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THE HART

AND

THE WATER-BROOKS;

A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION OF

THE FORTY-SECOND PSALM.

BY THE

REV. JOHN R. MACDUFF, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "MORNING AND NIGHT WATCHES," "MEMORIES OF GENNESARET," "WORDS OF JESUS," "THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. PAUL," ETC., ETC.

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1860.

THE FORTY-SECOND PSALM.

¶ *To the Chief Musician,* MASCHIL, *for the Sons of Korah.*

1 As the hart panteth after the water-brooks,—so panteth my soul
after thee, O God.
2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:—when shall I
come and appear before God?
3 My tears have been my meat day and night,
While they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?
4 When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me:
For I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house
of God,
With the voice of joy and praise,—with a multitude that kept holy
day.

5 Why art thou cast down, O my soul?—and why art thou dis-
quieted in me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him
For the help of his countenance [or, His presence is salvation].

6 O my God, my soul is cast down within me:
Therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of
the Hermonites,
From the hill Mizar.
7 Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts;
All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.
8 Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time,
And in the night his song shall be with me,
And my prayer unto the God of my life.
9 I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?
Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

10 As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me;
While they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?

11 Why art thou cast down, O my soul?—and why art thou disquieted within me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him,
Who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

* The title of the Psalm (משכיל Maschil—*instruction,*) is the same as that of other twelve. Some have referred the word merely to the music—indicating the tune to which the Psalms were set,—demanding of the sons of Korah, and "the chief musician," (the conductors of temple-song,) some melody specially adapted to the sentiments they contain. Others, with greater probability, take it as indicative of their *design;*—that while expressive of personal feeling and experience, they were intended for the "instruction" and comfort of the Church in all ages. Hence the term given to them of *didactic.*

Though his name is not mentioned, there is little doubt that David, and not the sons of Korah, as some have supposed, was the author of this Psalm. The reader is referred to *Hengstenberg* for a statement of the internal grounds, in the Psalm itself, to favour this conclusion. "To me," says Calvin, "it appears more probable that the sons of Korah are here mentioned because this Psalm was committed as a precious treasure to be preserved by them;—as we know that out of the number of the singers some were chosen and appointed to be keepers of the Psalms. That there is no mention made of David's name, does not in itself involve any difficulty, since we see the same omission in other Psalms, of which there is, notwithstanding, the strongest grounds for concluding that he was author."

According to an arbitrary division by the Jews of their Psalter into five parts, supposed to have been made by Ezra after the return from Babylon, the Forty-second Psalm forms the commencement of the second book. Regarding its structure, we may remark, that it is divided into two portions or *strophes,* each of these closing with a refrain in verses 5 and 11.

The following is an excellent poetical paraphrase of the Psalm, by Bishop Lowth :—

"As pants the wearied hart for cooling springs,
That sinks exhausted in the summer's chase;
So pants my longing soul, great King of kings!
So thirsts to reach Thy sacred dwelling-place.

On briny tears my famish'd soul hath fed,
While taunting foes deride my deep despair;
'Say, where is now thy Great Deliverer fled,
Thy mighty God, deserted wanderer, where?'

Oft dwell my thoughts on those thrice happy days,
When to Thy fane I led the willing throng;
Our mirth was worship, all our pleasure praise,
And festal joys still closed with sacred song.

Why throb, my heart? why sink, my saddening soul,
Why droop to earth, with various foes oppress'd?
My years shall yet in blissful circles roll,
And peace be yet an inmate of this breast.

By Jordan's banks with devious steps I stray,
O'er Hermon's rugged rocks and deserts dear:
E'en there Thy hand shall guide my lonely way,
There Thy remembrance shall my spirit cheer.

In rapid floods the vernal torrents roll,
Harsh sounding cataracts responsive roar;
Thine angry billows overwhelm my soul,
And dash my shatter'd bark from shore to shore.

Yet Thy sure mercies ever in my sight,
 My heart shall gladden through the tedious day;
And 'midst the dark and gloomy shades of night,
 To Thee I 'll fondly tune the grateful lay.

Rock of my hope! great Solace of my heart!
 Why, why desert the offspring of Thy care,
While taunting foes thus point th' invidious dart,
 'Where is thy God, abandon'd wanderer, where?'

Why faint, my soul? why doubt Jehovah's aid?
 Thy God the God of mercy still shall prove;
Within His courts thy thanks shall yet be paid,
 Unquestion'd be His pity and His love."

INTRODUCTORY.

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I.

The Scene of the Psalm.

"Where is thy favour'd haunt, Eternal Voice,
The region of Thy choice,
Where, undisturb'd by sin and earth, the soul
Owns Thine entire control?
'Tis on the mountain's summit dark and high,
Where storms are hurrying by:
'Tis 'mid the strong foundations of the earth,
Where torrents have their birth.
No sounds of worldly toil ascending there
Mar the full burst of prayer;
Lone nature feels that she may freely breathe,
And round us and beneath
Are heard her sacred tones: the fitful sweep
Of winds across the steep,
The dashing waters where the air is still,
From many a torrent rill—
Such sounds as make deep silence in the heart
For thought to do her part."

"The spot was so attractive to me, as well as the view of the surrounding country so charming, that I had great difficulty in tearing myself away from it. In the foreground, at my feet, was the Jordan flowing through its woods of tamarisks. On the other side rose gently the plain of Beisan surmounted by the high *tell* of that name. In the distance were the mountains of Gilboa—the whole stretch of which is seen, even as far as ancient Jezreel."—*Van de Velde's Travels in Syria and Palestine*, vol. ii. p. 355.

I.

THE SCENE OF THE PSALM.

All recent explorers of Palestine speak in glowing terms of that "solemn eastern back-ground," with its mellow tints of blue and purple, rising conspicuous, as if a wall built by giants, from the deep gorge or valley of the Jordan. This mountain range, and especially the hills of Gilead, with their rugged ravines and forests of sycamore and terebinth, are full of blended memories of joy and sadness. From one of these slopes, the Father of the Faithful obtained his first view of his children's heritage. On another, the Angels of God—the two bright celestial bands—greeted Jacob on his return from his sojourn in Syria.* From another, trains of wailing captives on their way to Babylon, must oft and again have taken through their tears their last look of "the mountains round about Jerusalem." Nigh the same spot, the footsteps of our blessed Redeemer

* Gen. xxxii. 1.

Himself lingered, when death was hovering over the couch of the friend He loved at Bethany. Martha and Mary, from their Village-home, must have lifted their eyes to these same "hills," from whence they knew, in the extremity of their anguish, their "help" alone could come. While, at a later period, the same spot was rendered illustrious as the locality of *Pella*, the mountain fortress and asylum whither their Lord had admonished His followers to flee, when the Imperial Eagles of Rome were gathered by Titus around the devoted city.*

This "land beyond the Jordan" still further derives an imperishable interest from being the exile-retreat of the Sweet Singer of Israel in the most pathetic period of his chequered life and reign. There is no more touching episode in all Hebrew history than the recorded flight of David from his capital on the occasion of the rebellion of Absalom and

* See Mr Stanley's chapter, in his "Sinai and Palestine," on "Perœa and the Trans-Jordanic Tribes," in which these different references are graphically grouped together. "The Perœan hills are the 'Pisgah' of the earlier history: to the later history they occupy the pathetic relation that has been immortalised in the name of 'the long ridge,' from which the first and last view of Granada is obtained. They are the 'Last Sigh' of the Israelite exile."—(P. 328.)

the defection of his people. Passing, barefoot and weeping, across the brook Kedron, and thence by the fords of Jericho, he sped northwards with his faithful adherents, and found a temporary shelter amid these remote fastnesses.

Minds of a peculiar temperament have often found it a relief, in seasons of sadness, to give expression to their pent-up feelings in poetry or song. Ancient as well as modern verse and music abound with striking examples of this,—"Songs in the Night," when the mouldering harp was taken down from the willows by some captive spirit, and made to pour forth its strains or numbers in touching elegy. David's own lament for Jonathan is a gush of intensified feeling which will occur to all, and which could have been penned only in an agony of tears.*

It was a spirit crushed and broken with other, but not less poignant sorrows, which dictated this

* As an example in modern poetry, need we refer to that noblest tribute ever penned over departed worth, the "*In Memoriam*" of Tennyson; or in modern song, to the exquisite and plaintive loveliness of this very Psalm, set to music by Mendelssohn, and so well known by the title, "*As the hart panteth.*"

Psalm of his exile. May we not imagine that, in addition to the tension of feeling produced by his altered fortunes, there was in the very scene of his banishment, where the plaintive descant was composed, much to inspire poetic sentiment? The alternate calm and discord of outer nature found their response in his own chequered experiences. Nature's Æolian harp—its invisible strings composed of rustling leaves and foaming brooks, or the harsher tones of tempest and thunder, flood and waterfall—awoke the latent harmonies of his soul. They furnished him with a key-note to discourse higher melodies, and embody struggling thoughts in inspired numbers. In reading this Psalm we at once feel that we are with the Minstrel King, not in the Tabernacle of Zion, but in some glorious "House not made with hands,"—some Cathedral whose aisles are rocky cliffs and tangled branches, and its roof the canopy of Heaven!

Let us picture him seated in one of those deep glens listening to the murmur of the rivulet and the wail of the forest. Suddenly the sky is overcast. Dark clouds roll their masses along the purple peaks. The lightning flashes; and the old

oaks and terebinths of Bashan bend under the tumult of the storm. The higher rivulets have swelled the channel of Jordan,—"deep calls to deep"—the waves chafe and riot along the narrow gorges. Suddenly a struggling ray of sunshine steals amid the strife, and a stray note from some bird answers joyously to its gleam. It is, however, *but* a gleam. The sky again threatens, fresh bolts wake the mountain echoes. The river rolls on in augmented volume, and the wind wrestles fiercely as ever with the denizens of the forest. At last the contest is at an end. The sky is calm—the air refreshed—the woods are vocal with song—ten thousand dripping boughs sparkle in the sunlight; the meadows wear a lovelier emerald; and rock, and branch, and floweret, are reflected in the bosom of the stream.

As the royal spectator with a poet and painter's eye is gazing on this shifting diorama, and when Nature is laughing and joyous again amid her own tear-drops, another simple incident arrests his attention. A Hart or Deer, hit by the archers or pursued by some wild beast on these "mountains of the leopards," with hot eyeballs and panting sides, comes bounding down the forest glade to quench

the rage of thirst. The sight suggests nobler aspirations. With trembling hand and tearful eye the exiled spectator awakes his harp-strings, and bequeaths to us one of the most pathetic musings in the whole Psalter. The 23d has happily been called "the nightingale of the Psalms;" this may appropriately be termed "the turtle-dove." We hear the lonely bird as if seated on a solitary branch warbling its "reproachful music," or rather struggling on the ground with broken wing, uttering a doleful lament. These strains form an epitome of the Christian life—a diary of religious experience, which, after three thousand years, find an echo in every heart. Who can wonder that they have smoothed the death-pillow of dying saints, and taken a thorn from the crown of the noble army of martyrs! *

* I refer the reader to the words quoted on the title-page. They form the dying testimony and experience of one of the holiest men of any age. We have seen in the possession of a revered friend, the Bible which belonged to the great Marquis of Argyle, and which formed his constant companion during the period of his imprisonment. Almost every verse of the 42d Psalm is specially marked. Some of the verses, such as the third, are noted with a double stroke. We may well imagine him, after closing such "an afflicted man's companion," thus writing to his Marchioness—"They may shut me in prison where they please, but they cannot shut out God from me."

II.

The General Scope of the Psalm.

"Like unto ships far off at sea,
Outward or homeward bound are we:
Before, behind, and all around
Floats and swings the horizon's bound;
Seems at its outer rims to rise,
And climb the crystal wall of the skies;
And then again to turn and sink,
As if we could slide from its outer brink.
Ah! it is not the sea that sinks and shelves,
But ourselves
That rock and rise
With endless and uneasy motion—
Now touching the very skies,
Now sinking into the depths of ocean."

"The Scriptures have laid a flat opposition between faith and sense. We live by faith and not by sense. They are two buckets —the life of faith and the life of sense; when one goes up, the other goes down."—*Bridge*, 1637.

"There are twins striving within me; a Jacob and an Esau. I can, through Thy grace, imitate Thy choice, and say with Thee, *Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.* Blessed God! make Thou that word of Thine good in me, that *the elder shall serve the younger.*"—*Bishop Hall*, 1656.

II.

THE GENERAL SCOPE OF THE PSALM.

"If the Book of Psalms be, as some have styled it, a mirror or looking-glass of pious and devout affections, this Psalm, in particular, deserves as much as any one Psalm to be so entitled, and is as proper as any other to kindle and excite such in us. Gracious desires are here strong and fervent; gracious hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are here struggling. Or we may take it for a conflict between sense and faith; sense objecting, and faith answering." *

In these few words, the Father of commentators, with his wonted discernment, has given us the key to the true interpretation of this sacred song. It may be regarded, indeed, as the Old Testament parallel to the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in which another inspired writer truthfully and powerfully portrays the same great struggle between

* Matthew Henry.

corruption and grace, faith and sense, "the old and the new man."

There are two antagonist principles in the heart of every believer, corresponding to the great forces which act in the material world. The tendency of his new nature is to gravitate towards God—the Divine Sun of his being—the centre of his fondest affections — the object of his deepest love. But "there is a law in his members warring against the law of his mind;"*—the remains of his *old* nature, leading him to wander in wide and eccentric orbit from the grand Source of light, and happiness, and joy! "*What will ye see in the Shulamite?*" asks the Spouse in the Canticles, personating the believer, (at a time, too, when conscious of devoted attachment to the Lord she loved). The reply is, "*As it were the company of two armies.*" (Sol. Song vi. 13.) Sight on the one hand, Faith on the other. The carnal mind, which is enmity against God, battling with the renewed spiritual mind, which brings life and peace. Affections heaven-born, counteracted and marred by affections earth-born. The magnet would be true to its pole but

* Rom. vii. 23.

for disturbing moral influences. The eagle would soar, but it is chained to the cage of corruption. The believer would tread boldly on the waves, but unbelief threatens to sink him. He would fight the battles of the faith, but there is "a body of death" chained to his heavenly nature, which compels him to mingle denunciations of himself as "a wretched man" with the shouts of victory.*

We may imagine David, when he composed this Psalm, wrapped in silent contemplation — the past, the present, and the future suggesting mingled reflections. The shepherd, the king, the fugitive! Sad comment on the alternations of human life! humbling lesson for God's Anointed! It furnishes him with a true estimate of the world's greatness. It has taught him the utter nothingness of all here as a portion for the soul. Amid outward trial and inward despondency, FAITH looks to its only true refuge and resting-place. His truant heart softened and saddened by calamity, turns to its God,—"*As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:*

* Rom. vii. 24, 25.

when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ver. 1, 2.) But the wave is beaten back again! He remembers his sins and his sorrows, and (more galling to his sensitive spirit) the taunts of ungodly scoffers. *"My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"* (Ver. 3.) Moreover, he is denied the solace of public ordinances. He can no longer, as once he could, light the decaying ashes of his faith at the fires of the altar. Memory dwelt with chastened sadness on the hours of holy convocation. *"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day."* (Ver. 4.) But, once more, the new-born principle regains the mastery. He rebukes his own unbelief, urges renewed dependence on God, and triumphs in the assurance of His countenance and love. *"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."* (Ver. 5.) But again the harp is muffled! *Unbelief* musters her ranks; fresh

remembrances of sin and sorrow crowd upon him. "*O my God, my soul is cast down within me.*" (Ver. 6.) *Faith,* however, has its antidote at hand, and the momentary cause of depression is removed. The memory of former succours and mercies inspires with confidence for the future, and he immediately adds, "*I will remember* THEE (in this the place of my Exile) *from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.*"

But the storm-clouds are still wreathing his sky; —nay, it seems as if the tempest were deepening. Fresh assaults of temptation are coming in upon him;—there seems no light in the cloud, no ray in the darkness. "*Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts; all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.*" (Ver. 7.) But again, his own extremity is God's opportunity; Faith is seen cresting the resurgent waves. Lifting his voice above the storm, he thus expresses his assurance in God's faithfulness, "*Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.*" (Ver. 8.) Nay, he resolves in all time to come to provide against the return of seasons

of guilty distrust and misgiving. He dictates and transcribes the very words of a prayer to be employed as an antidote in any such recurring moments of despondency. He resolves to rise above frames and feelings, and to plant his feet on the Rock of Ages, which these fluctuating billows can never shake ;—"*I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?*" (Ver. 9.) The Old nature makes one last and final effort, ere abandoning the conflict. Unbelief rallies its strength. A former assault is renewed. "*As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?*" (Ver. 10.) But he reverts to his prayer! He adopts his own liturgy for a time of sorrow. "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him.*" (Ver. 11.) He seems to be "answered while yet speaking;" for he closes with the joyful declaration, "*Who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*" (Ver. 11.) He had made a similar assertion in a former verse (ver. 5), "*I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance;*" but now he can add the language of

triumphant assurance, "My God!" The conflict is ended;—sense quits the field, and faith conquers. He began the Psalm in trouble, he ends it with joy. Its notes throughout are on the minor key, but these merge at last into a strain of triumph. He began comparing himself to the stricken deer—the helpless, breathless, panting fugitive;—he ends it with angels' words,—with the motto and watchword in which a seraph might well glory—heaven knows no happier—"My God!"

"He looked," says Matthew Henry, "upon the living God as his chief good, and had set his heart upon Him accordingly, and was resolved to live and die by Him; and casting anchor thus at first, he rides out the storm."

O child of God! touchingly expressive picture have we here of the strange vicissitudes in thy history. The shuttle in the web of thy spiritual life, darting hither and thither, weaving its chameleon hues; or, to adopt a more appropriate emblem, thy heart a battle-field, and "no discharge in that war" till the pilgrim-armour be exchanged for the pilgrim-rest:—sense and sin doing their utmost to

quench the bivouac-fires of faith, and give the enemy the advantage: ay, and they *would* succeed in quenching these, did not the Lord of pilgrims feed with the oil of His own grace the languishing flame. "Sometimes," it has been well said, "in the Voyages of the Soul, we feel that we can only go by anxious soundings,—the compass itself seeming useless—not knowing our bearings,—nearing here Christ—then perhaps the dim tolling bell amidst the thick darkness warning us to keep off."* But fear not; He will "bring you to the haven where ye would be." The voice of triumph will be heard high above the water-floods. The contest may be long, but it will not be doubtful. He who rules the raging of the sea will, in His own good time, say, "Peace, be still, and immediately there will be a great calm." Have you ever watched the career of the tiny branch or withered leaf which has been tossed into a little virgin rill on one of our high table-lands or mountain moors? For a while, in its serpentine course, it is borne sluggishly along, impeded by protruding moss, or stone, or lichen. Now it circles and saunters hither and

* Cheever's "Windings."

thither on the lazy streamlet—now floating back towards the point of departure, as if uncertain which direction to choose. A passing breath of wind carries it to the centre, and the buoyant rivulet sings its way joyously onward, bearing its little burden through copse, and birch, and heather. But again it is obstructed. Some deep inky pool detains it in the narrow ravine. There it is sucked in, whirled and twisted about, chafed and tortured with the conflict of waters; or else it lies a helpless prisoner, immured by the rocks in their fretting caldrons. But by and by, with a new impulse it breaks away along the rapid torrent-stream, bounding over cascade and water-fall, home to its ocean destiny.

So it is with the Soul! It is often apparently the sport and captive of opposing currents. It has its pools of darkness, its eddies of unbelief, its jagged rocks of despair, but it will eventually clear them all. "All motion," to use the words of one of the best and saintliest of the old writers on this very Psalm (Sibbs), and which carry out our illustration, "All motion tends to rest, and ends in it. God is the centre and resting-place of the soul; and here David takes up his rest, and so let us. We see that dis-

cussing of objections in the consistory of the Soul, settles the Soul at last—Faith at length silencing all risings to the contrary. Then whatsoever times come, we are sure of a hiding-place and a sanctuary."

Yes! your life, notwithstanding all these fluctuations, will end triumphantly. It may, as in this Psalm, be now a pæan, then a dirge; now a *Miserere*, then a *Te Deum*. The *Miserere* and *Te Deum* may be interweaved throughout; but the latter will close the Life-story—the concluding strain will be the anthem of Victory. You may arrest the arrow in its flight—you may chain the water-fall, or stay the lightning, sooner than unsay the words of God, "*He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" (Phil. i. 6.)

Remember, God does not say, that "good work" is never to be impeded. He has never given promise in Scripture of an unclouded day—uninterrupted sunshine—a waveless, stormless sea. No, "the morning without clouds" is a heavenly emblem. The earthly one is "a day, in which the light shall neither be clear nor dark." (Zech. xiv. 6.) The analogy of the outer world of nature, at least under these our

chequered and ever-varying skies, teaches us this. Spring comes smiling, and pours her blossoms into the lap of Summer. But the skies lower, and the rain and battering hail descend, and the virgin blossoms droop their heads and almost die. Summer again smiles and the meadows look gay; the flowers ring merry chimes with their leaves and petals, and Autumn with glowing face is opening her bosom for the expected treasure. But all at once drought comes with her fiery footsteps. Every blade and floweret, gasping for breath, lift their blanched eyelids to the brazen sky; or the night-winds rock the laden branches and strew the ground. Thus we see it is not one unvarying, unchecked progression, from the opening bud to the matured fruit. But every succeeding month is scarred and mutilated by drought and moisture, wind and rain, storm and sunshine. Yet, never once has Autumn failed to gather up her golden sheaves; ay, and if you ask her testimony, she will tell that the very storm, and wind, and rain you dreaded as foes, were the best auxiliaries in filling her yellow garners.

If the experience of any one here present be that of "the deep" and "the water-flood"—"the stormy

wind and tempest," think ever of the closing words of the Psalm, and let them "turn your mourning into dancing; take off your sackcloth, and gird you with gladness!" *You* may change towards God, but He is unchanging towards *you.* The stars may be swept from our view by intervening clouds, but they shine bright as ever,—undimmed altar-fires in the great temple of the universe. Our *vision* may be at fault, but not their radiance and undying glory. The Being "not confined to temples made with hands," who met this wrestler of old in the forest of Gilead, and poured better than Gilead's balm into his bosom, is the same now as He was then. And if thou art a wrestler too, He seems through the moaning of the storm to say, "*Though thou fall, yet shalt thou not be cast down utterly, for the Lord upholdeth thee with his right hand.*"

"*My God!*" Oh, if that be the last entry in the Diary of religious experience, be not desponding now because of present passing shadows, but "thank God and take courage." It is written that "at evening-time it shall be light." (Zech. xiv. 7.) The sun may wade all day through murky clouds, but he will pillow his head at night on a setting couch of

vermilion and gold. "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with *yellow gold.*"* It was said by aged Jacob, in his prophetic death-song, regarding that very tribe on the borders of which the royal exile now sang, "GAD, *a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.*"† Was not this the key-note of his present elegy? Faith could lift its head triumphant in the clang of battle, amid these troops of spiritual plunderers, and sing, "*Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in* THIS *will I be confident.*"‡

* Ps. lxviii. 13. † Gen. xlix. 19. ‡ Ps. xxvii. 3.

III.

A Peculiar Experience.

"I ask'd the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

"'Twas He who taught me thus to pray;
And He, I trust, has answer'd prayer,
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

"I hoped that in some favour'd hour
At once He'd answer my request;
And by His love's constraining power,
Subdue my sins and give me rest.

"Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part."

—*Cowper.*

"If we listen to David's harp, we shall hear as many hearse-like harmonies as carols."—*Lord Bacon.*

"If we be either in outward affliction or in inward distress, we may accommodate to ourselves the melancholy expressions we find here. If not, we must sympathise with those whose case they speak too plainly, and thank God it is not our own case."—*Matthew Henry.*

III.

A PECULIAR EXPERIENCE.

ALTHOUGH this Psalm, in bold and striking figure, presents a faithful miniature picture of the Believer's life, we must regard it as depicting an extraordinary experience at a peculiar passage of David's history, and which has its counterpart still in that of many of God's children.

The writer of the Psalm was evidently undergoing "spiritual depression"—what is sometimes spoken of as "spiritual desertion,"—that sorrow, awful in its reality—too deep for utterance—deeper than the yawning chasm made by family bereavement—the sorrow of all sorrows, the loss of God in the soul!

There is much caution needed in speaking of this. There are causes which lead to spiritual depression which are purely physical, arising from a diseased body, an overstrung mind—a succession of calamities weakening and impairing the nervous system. We know how susceptible are the body and mind together, of being affected by external influences.

"We are," says an able analyser of human emotions, "fearfully and wonderfully made. Of that constitution which in our ignorance we call union of soul and body, we know little respecting what is cause, and what effect. We would fain believe that the mind has power over the body ; but it is just as true that the body rules the mind. Causes apparently the most trivial—a heated room, want of exercise—a sunless day, a northern aspect—will make all the difference between happiness and unhappiness ; between faith and doubt; between courage and indecision. To our fancy there is something humiliating in being thus at the mercy of our animal organism. We would fain find nobler causes for our emotions." * Yes—many of those sighs and tears, and morbid, depressed feelings, which Christians speak of as the result of spiritual darkness and the desertion of God, are merely the result of physical derangement, the penalty often for the violation of the laws of health. The atmosphere we breathe is enough to account for them. They come and go—rise and fall with the mercury in the tube. These are cases, not for the spiritual, but for the bodily

* Rev. Fred. Robertson's "Sermons; Second Series," p. 85.

physician. Their cure is in attendance to the usual laws and prescriptions which regulate the healthy action of the bodily functions.

There is another class of causes which lead to spiritual depression which are partly physical and partly religious. There must necessarily be depression where there is undue elation; where the soul-structure is built on fluctuating frames and feelings, and the religious life is made more *subjective* than *objective*.

Many imagine, unless they are at all times in a glow of fervour—an ecstatic frame of feeling—all must be wrong with them.* Now, there is nothing more dangerous or deceptive than a life of mere feeling; and its *most* dangerous phase is a life of religious emotional excitement. It is in the last degree erroneous to consider all this glowing ecstasy of frame a necessary condition of healthy spiritual life. Artificial

* "You will not be asked in the last Great Day whether you had great enjoyment and much enlargement of soul here. Speak to that vast multitude, which no man can number, now around the throne. Ask them whether they came through much *consolation* and joy in the Lord. No! through much *tribulation*. Ask them whether they were saved by their warmth of love to their Saviour. No! but they had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."—*Miss Plumptre's Letters.*

excitement, in any shape, is perilous. Apart altogether from the moral and religious aspect of the question, the tendency of the ball-room and theatre, and a preference in reading for works of fiction, is to make a man nauseate the plain, commonplace work, the occurrences and themes of this every-day world. Feed him on dainties and forced meats, and he despises husks and plain fare. Equally true is this with regard to the life of the soul. It is not fed on luscious stimulants and ecstatic experiences. When it is so, the result is every now and then a collapse; like a child building his mimic castle too high, the perpendicular and equilibrium are lost. It totters and falls, and he has just to begin again. The dew distils, and hangs its spangled jewels on blade and flower, gently and in silence. The rain comes down in tiny particles and soft showers, not in drenching water-floods. So the healthy Christian holds on the even tenor of his way, unaffected by the barometer of feeling. He knows this is apt to be elevated and depressed by a thousand accidents over which he has no control. His life is fed, not from the fitful and uncertain streams issuing from the low ground of his own

experience, but from the snow-clad summits—the Alps of God. Were he thus suffering himself to depend on the rills of his own feelings, his brook would often be dry in summer—the season when he most needed it; whereas the supply from the glacier-beds on which the sun shines, is fullest in these very times of drought.

Add to this, religion is shorn of its glory when it is dwarfed into a mere thing of sentiment and feeling. Its true grandeur and greatness is, when it incorporates itself with active duty, and fulfils its best definition as not a "*being*" but a "*doing.*" Of nothing, therefore, do we require to be more jealous, than a guilty, unmanly, morbid dwelling on feelings and experiences. You remember Elijah, when he fled pusillanimous and panic-stricken from his work, and took to a hermit-cell amid the solitudes of Sinai. We find him seated in his lonely cave, his head drooping on his breast, sullen thought mantling his brow, muttering his querulous soliloquy, "I am left alone." The voice of God hunts out the fugitive from duty. "What doest thou here, Elijah? Why in this cave, brooding in a coward spirit, unworthy of thee? Art thou to

cease to work for *Me*, because the high day of excitements on the heights of Carmel are over? Here is food to strengthen thy body, and here is 'the still, small voice' of my love to strengthen thy soul. Go forth to active duty. Leave thy cave and thy cloak behind thee. Take thy pilgrim staff and scrip, and with the consciousness of a great work in hand, and a brief time to do it in, arise, and onward to Horeb, the mount of God!" (1 Kings xix.)

But having thrown out these preliminary cautions, the question occurs: *Are* there no cases of spiritual depression or desertion, arising purely from *spiritual* causes?

We answer, Yes. The Bible recognises such. Spiritual darkness—absence of all spiritual comfort and joy—is no figment of man's theological creed. It is a sad and solemn verity—the experience, too, of God's own children. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, *that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?*" (Isa. l. 10.) "Oh," says the afflicted patriarch of Uz, "that I were as in months

past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness." (Job xxix. 2, 3.) "In my prosperity," is the testimony of David, at a later period of his life, "I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: *thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled.*" (Ps. xxx. 5–7.) "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: *I sought him, but I found him not.* . . . My beloved had *withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*" (Sol. Song iii. 2, v. 6.) Can we forget a more awful and impressive example? ONE soaring above the reach of all grovelling human experiences, but yet who tells us, in His bitter Eloi cry, that even HE knew what it was to be God-deserted and forsaken!

Are there any whose eyes trace these pages who have ever undergone such a season? or it may be are undergoing it now? I stop not to inquire as to the cause;—indulged sin, omitted or carelessly performed

duty, neglect of prayer, worldly conformity.* Are you feelingly alive, painfully conscious that your love, like that of many, has waxed cold;—are you mourning that you have not the nearness to the Mercy-seat that once you enjoyed,—not the love of your Bibles, and ordinances, and sacraments that you once had,—that a heavy cloud mantles your spiritual horizon,—God's countenance, not what once it was, irradiated with a Father's smiles,—nor heaven what once it seemed, a second home?

"O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, not comforted!" do not despond. In these very sighings and moanings of your downcast spirit, there are elements for hope and comfort, not for despair. They are the evidences and indications that the spark, though feeble, is not quenched—that the pulse, though languid, still beats—that faith, though like a grain of mustard-seed, is still germinating. "O thou

* "In the time of need He hides Himself often, and seems to have forgotten me. Tears have thus been my meat, because of their saying unto my soul, 'Where is now thy God?' But I am bound by all the experienced freeness and riches of the Redeemer's grace to say, that when He hides Himself from me, it is not because He has forgotten *me*, but because I have been forgetting Him."—*Hewitson.*

of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt?" It is that very *shadow* that has now come athwart your soul, and which you so bitterly mourn, which tells of *sunshine.* As it is the shadow which enables us to read the hours on the dial, so is it in the spiritual life. It is because of these shadows on the soul's dial-face that we can infer the shining of a better Sun. "The wicked have no bands in *their* (spiritual) death." Their life has been nothing but shadow; they cannot therefore mourn the loss of a sunshine they never felt or enjoyed. Well has it been said, "When the refreshing dews of grace seem to be withheld, and we are ready to say, 'Our hope is lost, God hath forgotten to be gracious'—this is that furnace in which one that is not a child of God never was placed. For Satan takes good care not to disquiet his children. He has no fire for their souls on this side everlasting burnings; his fatal teaching ever is, Peace, peace!" * But what, desponding one, is, or ought to be, thy resort? Go! exile in spirit—go, like that royal mourner amid the oak-thickets of Gilead! Brood no more in unavailing sorrow and with burning tears. Thou mayest, like him,

* Miss Plumptre's Letters.

have much to depress thy spirit. Black and crimson sins may have left their indelible stain on the page of memory. In aching heart-throbs, thou mayest be heaving forth the bitter confession, "*Mine* iniquities have separated between me and my God." But go like him! take down thy silent harp. Its strings may be corroded with rust. They may tell the touching story of a sad estrangement. Go to the quiet solitude of thy chamber. Seek out the unfrequented path of prayer;—choked it may be with the weeds of forgetfulness and sloth. Cast thyself on thy bended knees; and, as the wounded deer bounds past thee (emblem of thine own bleeding heart), wake the echoes of thy spirit with the penitential cry, "*As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!*"

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The Hart Panting.

"Oh, would I were as free to rise
As leaves on autumn's whirlwind borne,
The arrowy light of sunset skies,
Or sound—or rays—or star of morn,
Which meets in heaven at twilight's close,
Or aught which soars uncheck'd and free,
Through earth and heaven, that I might lose
Myself in finding Thee!"

"O mysterious Jesus, teach us Thy works and Thy plans. Let our hearts pant after Thee as the hart after the water-brooks. Create a thirst which nothing shall satisfy but the fountain of eternal love. See the velocity with which the needle flees to the magnet *when it gets within distance;* so shall we hasten to our Magnet—our Beloved—as we approach Him."—*Lady Powerscourt's Letters.*

"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."—*Verse* 1.

I.

THE HART PANTING.

We have pictured, in a preceding chapter, the uncrowned Monarch of Israel seated, pensive and sad, amid "the willows by the water-courses;" or wandering forth, amid the deepening twilight-shadows, with the roll of Jordan at his side, perhaps, like his great ancestor, to "wrestle with God until the breaking of the day."

We have already adverted to the simple incident which arrested his attention. A breathless tenant of the forest bounded past him to quench its thirst in the neighbouring river. That unconscious child of nature furnishes the key-note of his song. Let us sit by the banks, as the Exile takes down his harp, and thus sings—"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

God is the only satisfying portion of the soul.

Every theory of human happiness is defective and incomplete which falls short of the aspirations of our immortal natures. Born with capacities for the infinite, man naturally spurns the finite. No satellite, with its borrowed light, will compensate for the loss of the sun. You may as well expect the caged wild beast to be happier within the iron bars of his den than roaming lord of the forest, as for the human spirit to be content with the present and the finite as a substitute for the immortal and the infinite! The water-brooks alone could slake the thirst of that roe on the mountains of Gilead. You might have offered it choicest pastures. You might have bid it roam the sunniest glades of the forest, or repose under the majestic shadow of the monarch-oaks of Bashan; it would have spurned them all; and, with fleet foot, have bounded down the valley in search of the stream.

So with the soul. Nothing but the stream flowing from the Everlasting Hills will satisfy it. You may tempt a man, as he is hurrying on his immortal way, with the world's pastures,—you may hold out to him the golden sheaves of riches,—you may detain him amid the sunny glades of pleasure, or on the

hill-tops of fame (and he is but too willing for a while to linger)—but satisfy him they cannot! When his nobler nature acquires its rightful ascendancy he will spurn them all. Brushing each one in succession away, as the stag does the dewy drops of the morning, he will say—"All are insufficient! I wish them not. I have been mocked by their failure. I have found that each has a lie in its right hand;—it is a poor counterfeit—a shadowy figure of the true. I want the fountain of living waters—I want the Infinite of Knowledge, Goodness, Truth, Love!" "In the LORD put I my trust: why say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?"*

The fact is, it is the very grandeur of the soul which leads it thus to pant after God. Small things satisfy a small capacity, but what is made receptive of the vast and glorious can only be satisfied with great things. The mind of the child is satisfied with the toy or the bauble; the mind of the untutored savage with bits of painted glass or tinsel; but the man, the sage, the philosopher, desiderate higher possessions, purer knowledge, nobler themes of thought and objects of ambition. Some insects are

* Psalm xi. 1.

born for an hour, and are satisfied with it. A summer's afternoon is the duration of existence allotted to myriads of tiny *ephemera.* In *their* case, youth and age are crowded into a few passing minutes. The descending sun witnesses their birth and death; —the lifetime of other animals would be to them an immortality. The soul, being infinite and unlimited in its capacities, has correspondingly high aspirations. Vain would be the attempt to fill up a yawning gulf by throwing into it a few grains of sand. But not more vain or ineffectual than try to answer the deep yearnings of the human spirit by the seen and the temporal.

Yes! on all the world's fountains, drink at them as you may, "*thirst again*" is written. Of the world's mountains, climb them as you may, you will never say, "I have reached the coveted summit. It is enough." Men go sighing on, drinking their rivers of pleasure and climbing their mountains of vanity. They feel all the while some undefined, inarticulate, nameless longing after a satisfying good; but it is a miserable travestie to say that it has been found, or can be found, in anything here. "*Who will shew us any good?*" will still be the cry of the groping

seeker till he has learned to say, "*Lord, lift* THOU *upon me the light of thy countenance.*"

We know how hard and difficult it is to convince of these sublime verities. The soul, even in its hours of trouble and deep conviction, is like a cast-away from shipwreck, who sees from his raft-planks something cresting the waves. He imagines it an island! As he nears it, he fancies he sees purple flowers drooping over the solid rock, and the sea-birds nestling in the crevices. But it is only an aggregate of withered leaves and rotten branches, which the receding tide has tossed together, the wayward freak of old ocean.

> "All are wanderers gone astray
> Each in his own delusions; they are lost
> In chase of fancied happiness, still woo'd
> And never won. Dream after dream ensues;
> And still they dream that they shall still succeed,
> And still are disappointed. Rings the world
> With the vain stir. I sum up half mankind,
> And add two-thirds of the remaining half,
> And find the total of their hopes and fears
> Dreams, empty dreams."*—*Cowper's Task.*

* "I was at the very zenith of earthly happiness. On returning from the ball, I took a hasty review of the evening I had passed as I lay sleepless upon my pillow. The glitter—the music—the dance—the excitement—the attention—the pleasure—all passed before me. But, oh! I felt a want I could not describe.

Let him who would solve this great problem of Happiness go to that parable of nature—the hunted Stag seeking the water-brooks, the thirsty soul seeking its God. God is the *home* of the soul, and he is away from home who pitches his tent and weaves his heart affections around anything short of Him. Who has not heard of "home-sickness"—the desolate feelings of the lonely stranger in a strange land? Let affection, and friendship, and pity do what they may to alleviate the pang of distance and separation, though beaming faces be around, and hands of love and sympathy be extended, still will the heart (despite of all) be roaming the old hallowed haunts, climbing in thought the hills of childhood, gazing on the old village church with its festoons of ivy, seated under the aged elm, or listening to the music of the passing brook and the music of voices sweeter and lovelier than all! The soul is that stranger, dwelling in the tents of Kedar, and panting for Heaven and God. Its language is, "I am *not* at home, I am a stranger here." Manifold, too, are the voices in this the land of its

I sighed, and, throwing my arm over my head, whispered to myself these expressive words, *'Is this all?'*"—*Mrs Winslow, Life.*

exile, whispering, "*Arise ye and depart, for this is* NOT *your rest!*" *

You may have seen in our mountain glens, in the solemn twilight, birds winging their way to their nests. There may be lovely bowers, gardens of fragrance and beauty, close by,—groves inviting to sweetest melody, Nature's consecrated haunts of song. But they tempt them not. Their nests—their *homes*—are in yonder distant rock, and thither they speed their way! So with the soul. The painted glories of this world will not satisfy it. There is no rest in these for its weary wing and wailing cry. It goes singing up and home to God. It has its nest in the crevices of the Rock of Ages. When detained in the nether valley, often is the warbling note heard, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest." And when the flight has been made from the finite to the infinite—from the lower valleys of sense to the hills of faith—from the creature to the Creator—from man to God,—as we see it folding its buoyant pinion and sinking into the eternal clefts, we listen to the song, "*Return unto thy rest, O my soul!*"

* Micah ii. 10.

Reader! may this flight be yours. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found!" The creature may change, He cannot. The creature must die, He is eternal. "*O God, thou art my God; early will I seek* THEE: *my soul thirsteth for* THEE, *my flesh longeth for* THEE *in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. . . . Because Thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee.*" (Ps. lxiii.)

II.

The Hart Wounded.

"I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
Long since. With many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew,
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by th' archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and heal'd, and bade me live!"

—*Cowper.*

"It was in this extremity it occurred to her that, in the deficiency of all hope in creatures, there might be *hope and help in God.* Borne down by the burdens of a hidden providence (a providence which she did not then love, because she did not then understand it) she yielded to the pressure that was upon her, and began to look to Him in whom alone there is true assistance."—*Madame Guyon's Life,* p. 38.

"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."—*Verse* 1.

II.

THE HART WOUNDED.

ARE we not warranted to infer that it was the *wounded* stag which David now saw, or pictured he saw, seeking the brooks?—the hart hit by the archers, with blood-drops standing on its flanks, and its eye glazed with faintness, exhaustion, and death? But for these wounds it would never have come to the Valley. It would have been nestling still up in its native heath—the thick furze and cover of the mountain heights of Gilead. But the shaft of the archer had sped with unerring aim; and, with distended nostril and quivering limb, it hastens to allay the rage of its death-thirst.

Picture of David, ay, and of many who have been driven to drink of that "river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God." They are *wounded* spirits; the arrow festering in their souls, and drawing their life-blood. Faint, trembling, for-

lorn, weary, they have left the world's high ground —the heights of vanity, and indifference, and self-righteousness, and sin—and have sought the lowly Valley of humiliation.

What are some of these arrows? There are arrows from the quiver of MAN, and arrows from the quiver of GOD.

The *arrows of man* are often the cruellest of all. "*Lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.*" (Ps. xi. 2.) ENVY is an archer. His shaft is dipped in gall and wormwood. JEALOUSY is a bowman, whose barbed weapons cannot stand the prosperity of a rival. REVENGE has his quiver filled with keen points of steel, that burn to retaliate the real or imagined injury. MALICE is an archer that seeks his prey in ambush. He lurks behind the rock. He inflicts his wanton mischief—irreparable injury—on the absent or innocent. CONTEMPT is a bowman of soaring aim. He looks down with haughty, supercilious scorn on others. The teeth of such "are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." (Ps. lvii. 4.) DECEIT.—He is, in these our days, a huntsman

of repute—a modern Nimrod—with gilded arrows in his quiver, and a bugle, boasting great things, slung at his girdle. He makes his target the unsuspecting; decoys them, with siren look, within his toils, and leaves them, wounded and helpless, on "the mountains of prey!" "*Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.*" (Ps. cxx. 2–4.)

But there are arrows also from the *quiver of* GOD. "*The arrows of the Almighty,*" says Job, "*are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit.*" (Job vi. 4.) "*He hath bent His bow,*" says Jeremiah, "*and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of His quiver to enter into my reins.*" (Lam. iii. 12, 13.) And who will not breathe the prayer of the Gilead Exile at another time?—"*Let me fall into the hands of God, for great are* HIS *mercies!*" "*Faithful are the wounds of* THIS *friend.*" (2 Sam. xxiv. 14; Prov. xxvii. 6.)

We need not stop to enumerate particularly these *arrows.* There is the blanched arrow of *sickness,* the rusted arrow of *poverty,* the lacerating arrow of

bereavement, stained and saturated with tears, and feathered from our own bosoms! There is the arrow, too, (though of a different kind,) of God's own blessed *Word,* "quick and powerful." "*Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies.*" (Ps. xlv. 5.)

Yet, blessed be God, these are often arrows which wound only to heal; or rather, which, from the wounds they create, send the bleeding, panting, thirsting soul to seek the waters of comfort in God himself. Suffering one! be thankful for thy wounds. But for these shafts thou mightest have been, at this moment, sleeping on the mountain heights of self-righteousness, or worldliness, or sin, with no thought of thy soul; the streams of salvation disowned; forsaking, and continuing to forsake, the "Fountain of Living Waters."

Let me ask, Has this been the result of thy woundings? Have they led thee from the "broken (leaky) cistern" to say, "All my springs are in THEE?" Remember affliction, worldly calamity, bereavement, have a twofold effect. It is a solemn alternative! They may drive thee nearer, they may drive thee farther from, thy God. They may drive

thee down to the gushing stream, or farther up the cold, freezing mountain-side. The wounded hart of this Psalm, on receiving the sting of the arrow, might have plunged only deeper and deeper into the toils of the huntsmen, or the solitudes of the forest. It might have gone with its pining eye, and broken heart, and bleeding wound, to bury itself amid the withered leaves.

How many there are whose afflictions seem to lead to this sad consequence; who, when mercies and blessings are removed, abandon themselves to sullen and morbid fretfulness; who, instead of bowing submissive to the hand that wounds and is able to heal, seem to feel as if they were denuded of their rights. Their language is the bitter reproach of Jonah — "*I do well to be angry, even unto death.*" Muffling themselves in hardened unbelief, their wretched solace is that of despair—"*It is better for me to die than to live.*"

"*Blessed is the man that* ENDURETH *temptation,*" not who rushes away to pine, and bleed, and die;—or to feed still on husks and the garbage of the wilderness, but who makes the nobler resolve, "*I will arise and go to my Father.*" Blessed is the man whose

cry, like that of the child, is answered by his Heavenly Parent bending over the cradle of his sorrow;—who feels, as the Psalmist did, that his gracious Father and God is never *so* near him as in a time of trial. "*When my spirit was overwhelmed,* THEN THOU *knewest my path.*" The bird of the desert is said to bury its head in the sand on the approach of its foes, and to abandon itself to destruction; but blessed is the man who rather is like the bird of the grove, the first twigs of whose nest have been ruthlessly pulled to pieces by the hand of violence. Hovering for a while over her pillaged home, she fills the wood with her plaintive lament, then soars away from the haunt of the destroyer to begin a fresh one, in a place of safety, on the top branch of some cedar of God!

Such was the case with David on the occasion of this Psalm. He had read to him the most touching homily the world *could* read on the precarious tenure of earthly blessings. His sceptre, his crown, his family, were like the bubbles on that foaming stream on which he gazed, dancing their little moment on its surface, then gone, and gone for ever. Is he to abandon himself to an ignoble despair? Is

he to conclude that the Lord has made him a target on which to exhaust His quiver—that He has "forgotten to be gracious?" Is he to join marauding chiefs beyond the Jordan, savage freebooters—become a mountain adventurer on these Gentile borders, and forget Zion and Zion's God? No! the earthly crown may fade, but the homeless, uncrowned, unsceptred monarch has a better home and a better King above; invisible walls and battlements, better than all the trenches and moats of an earthly fortress, encompass the wanderer. With his eye on these, thus he weaves his warrior song—"*I will say of the Lord, He is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*" (Ps. xviii. 2.)

Reader! let me ask you, in closing this chapter, are *you* panting for God?

This is not the way—this is not the history of *most.* They are panting, but *not* for God! They are panting up the hill, like Sisyphus, with their huge stone. *Ambition* is panting up the hill—no time to take a breath. *Pleasure* is panting up the hill—pursuing her butterfly existence—a phan-

tom chase—rushing from flower to flower, extracting all the luscious sweets she can. *Fame* is panting up the hill, blowing her trumpet before her, eager to erect her own monument on the coveted apex. *Mammon* is pushing up the hill with his panting team, to erect the temple of riches. Multitudes of hapless wayfarers in the same reckless scramble have tumbled into crevices, and are crying for help. Mammon's wheels are locked,—his treasure-chests have fallen into the mire;—and yet, *on* he goes, driving his jaded steeds over the poor, and weak, and helpless—ay, those that assisted him to load before he started at the mountain base. He must gain the top at all hazards as best he may; and he will be crowned a hero, too, and lauded for his feat!

Ah! strange that men should still be pursuing that phantom-chase. Or, rather, strange that they should live so immeasurably beneath the grandeur of their own destiny; rasping the shallows when they should be out in the deep sea; furling and warping the sails of immortality, instead of having every available yard of canvas spread to the breeze of heaven.

These objects of earthly, perishable pursuit, *may* do when the world is bright, the heart unwounded, the eye undimmed. These may do when the sun shines unclouded in our firmament, when our fields are waving, when fortune is weaving her golden web, and the bark of existence with its white sails is holding its way through summer seas. These may do when the home circle is unbroken; when we miss no loved face, when we mark no silent voice, no vacant chair. *But* when the muffled drum takes the place of life's joyous music;—when our skies are robed in sackcloth, when Nature takes on its hue of ashen paleness; when every flower, seared and frost-bitten, seems to droop its head in sadness and sorrow, and hide its tears amid withered leaves and blighted stems, exuding only the fragrance of decay! —what *then?* The prophet's voice takes up the lesson —"*The voice said, Cry; and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass!*" Poor trifler that thou art! to be so long mocked and deceived by a dead and dying world; desolate, friendless, hopeless, portionless; a vessel driven from its moorings, out unpiloted on a tempestuous sea! BUT there is a haven

for the tempest-tossed. The Saviour thou hast long despised and rejected, is a provided harbour for such as *thee.* "*A* MAN *shall be an hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*" (Isaiah xxxii. 2.)

Art thou panting after the streams of salvation? The Shepherd who feeds His flock by these "still waters" thus addresses thee—LET HIM THAT IS ATHIRST, COME.

ATHIRST! who is not athirst? It is the attribute of universal humanity! Who does not feel that this world is presenting us with muddy streams and broken, leaky cisterns? Who does not feel, in their moments of deep and calm reflection, when we are brought face to face with the great enigma of existence, that the world is serving up faded flowers instead of those redolent with imperishable fragrance, and glowing with unfading bloom? *Friendless one!*—thou who art standing alone like a solitary tree in the forest whom the woodman's axe has spared—thy compeers cut down at thy side—COME! *Child of calamity!* — the chill hand of penury laid on thine earthly comforts—the widow's

cruise fast failing, her staff of bread diminishing—COME! *Child of bereavement!*—the pillars in thy heart-shrine crumbling to decay, thy head bowed like a bulrush—thou who knowest that fortune may again replace and replenish her dismantled walls, but that nothing can reanimate thy still marble, or refill the vacant niche in thy heart of hearts—COME! *Prodigal!*—wanderer from God, exile from peace, roaming the forest-haunts of sin, plunging deeper and deeper into their midnight of ruin and despair—has an arrow, either from the quiver of man, or of God, wounded thy heart? Art thou, in thy agony, seeking rest and finding none,—having the gnawing feeling of dissatisfaction with all created things, and an undefined longing for a solace they cannot give? Yes! for *thee*, too, for thy gaping, bleeding wound there is "balm in Gilead, and a Physician there." I repeat, Jesus this day stands by the glorious streams of His own purchased salvation, and cries, saying—"*If any man* THIRST, *let him come unto me and drink!*"

"Yea, Lord!" be it yours to reply—"Lord, I *come!* thirsty, faint, forlorn, wounded, weary! I come, 'just as I am, without one plea.' Thou art all

I need, all I require, in sickness and health, in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death, in time and through eternity. The snow-clad hills may cease to feed the brooks;—that sun may cease to shine, or nature grow weary of his loving beams;—that moon may cease on her silver lyre, night by night, to discourse to the listening earth;—the birds may become mute at the voice of the morning;—flowers may droop, instead of ringing their thousand bells at the jubilant step of summer;—the gasping pilgrim may rush from the stream, and prefer the fiery furnace-glow of the desert sands,—but "this God shall be my God for ever and ever;" and, even when death is sealing my eyes, and the rush of darkness is coming over my spirit, even then will I take up the old exile strain—the great sigh of weary humanity—and blend its notes with the song of heaven—'As THE HART PANTETH AFTER THE WATER-BROOKS, SO PANTETH MY SOUL AFTER THEE, O GOD.'"

III.

The Living God.

"Hear me! To Thee my soul in suppliance turneth;
Like the lorn pilgrim on the sands accursed.
For life's sweet waters, God! my spirit yearneth:
Give me to drink. I perish here of thirst."

"Oh, it is His own self I pant after. Fellowship—living, constant, intimate fellowship with Him, is the cry He often hears from the desolate void of my unloving heart. How do I loathe the sin which makes the atmosphere so misty—the clouds so thick and dark!"—*Life of Adelaide Newton*, p. 246.

"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"—*Verse* 2.

III.

THE LIVING GOD.

In the two former chapters, we listened to the first sigh of the exile—the first strain of his plaintive song. It was the groping and yearning of his soul after God, as the alone object of happiness.

You may have watched the efforts of the plant, tossed amid rack and weed in some dark cellar, to climb to the light. Like the captive in the dungeon longing to cool his fevered brow in the air of heaven, its sickly leaves seem to struggle and gasp for breath. They grope, with their blanched colours, towards any chink or crevice or grated window, through which a broken beam is admitted. Or garden flowers choked amid rank luxuriance, or under the shade of tree or wall, how ambitious to assert their freedom, and pay homage to the parent sun, lifting their pendant leaves or petals as a target for his golden arrows!

The soul, away from the great Sun of its being, frets and pines and mourns! Every affection droops in languor and sadness when that light is away. Its abortive efforts to obtain happiness in other and meaner joys, and its dissatisfaction with them, is itself a testimony to the strength and loftiness of its aspiration—a manifesto of its real grandeur! The human affections must be fastened on *something!* They are like the clinging ivy which creeps along the ground, and grasps stones, rocks, weeds, and unsightly ruins, if it can find nothing else on which to fix its tendrils; but when it reaches the root of the tree, or base of the castle wall, it spurns its grovelling existence, and climbs its upward way till it hangs in graceful festoons from the topmost branch or turret.

We are to contemplate, now, a second breathing of this exiled supplicant—a new element in his God-ward aspiration.

"*My soul thirsteth for God,* FOR THE LIVING GOD: *when shall I come and appear before God?*"

This is no mere repetition of the former verse. It invests the believer's relationship to the object of his faith and hope with a new and more solemn interest.

For David's present condition and experience in the land of his exile—the feeling of utter isolation throbbing through the pulses of his soul,—there were required some extraordinary and peculiar sources of comfort. The old conventional dogmas of theology, at such seasons, are insufficient. Who has not felt, in some great crisis of their spiritual being, similar to his, when all the hopes and joys of existence rock and tremble to their foundations; when, by some sudden reverse of fortune, the pride of life becomes a shattered ruin; or, by some appalling bereavement, the hope and solace of the future is blighted and withered like grass;—who has not been conscious of a longing desire to know more of this infinite God, who holds the balances of Life and Death in His hands, and who has come forth from the inscrutable recesses of His own mysterious being, and touched us to the quick? What of His character, His attributes, His ways! There is a feeling, such as we never had before, to draw aside the veil which screens the Invisible. It may be faith in its feeblest form, awaking as from a dream; lisping the very alphabet of Divine truth, and asking, in broken and stammering accents, "Does God *really live?*—Is it,

after all, Deity, or is it Chance, that is ruling the world? Is this great Being near, or is He distant? Does He take cognizance of all events in this world; or are minute, trivial occurrences, contingent on the accidents of nature or the caprice of man? *Is He* THE LIVING ONE?" God, a distant abstraction shrouded in the awful mystery of His own attributes, will not do;—we must realise His presence; our cry, at such a time, is that of the old patriarch at the brook Jabbok, or of his descendant at the brooks of Gilead—"*Tell me thy* NAME." * Is it merely *love*, or is it the loving ONE? Is it *omnipotence*, or is it the almighty ONE? Is it some mysterious, impalpable principle, some property of matter or attribute of mind—or is it a *personal* Jehovah, one capable of loving and of being loved? Have the lips of incarnate truth and wisdom deceived us by a mere figure of speech, when, in the great Liturgy of the Church universal, in the prayer which is emphatically "His own," He hath taught us, in its opening words, to say, "Our FATHER which art in heaven, hallowed be thy NAME!"

How earnestly do the saints in former times, and

* Gen. xxxii. 28.

especially in their seasons of trial, cleave to the thought of this *personal* presence; in other words, a thirst for "the *living God!*"

What was the solace of the patriarch Job, as he was stretched on his bed of sackcloth and ashes, when other friends had turned against him in bitter derision, and were loading him with their reproaches? It was the realisation of a *living defender* who would vindicate his integrity,—"*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*" (Job xix. 25.)

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. The symbol taught him encouraging truths;—that the Hebrew race, after all their experience of fiery trial, would come forth unscathed and unconsumed. But the shepherd-leader desired more than this: he craved the assurance of a LIVING GOD—an ever-present guardian, a pillar to guide by day, and a column of defence by night. It was the truth that was borne to his ear from the desert's fiery oracle. There could be no grander watchword for himself, or for the enslaved people,—"*God said unto Moses,* I AM THAT I AM!" No comment is subjoined;—nothing to diminish the glory of that majestic utterance. The Almighty Speaker does

not qualify it by adding, "I am light, power, wisdom, glory;" but He simply declares His *being and existence*—He unfolds Himself as *"the living God!"* It is enough!

Elijah is in his cave at Horeb. All nature is convulsed around him. The rocks are rent with an earthquake. The sky is lurid with lightnings. Fragments of these awful precipices are torn and dislocated by the fury of the tempest, and go thundering down the Valley. Nature testifies to the presence, and majesty, and power of her God: but He is not in any of these! "The Lord is not there!" The Prophet waits for a further disclosure. He is not satisfied with seeing the skirts of God's garment. He must see the hand, and hear (though it be in gentle whispers) the voice of Him who sits behind the elements He has awoke from their sleep. Hence this formed the closing scene in that wild drama of the desert. *"After the fire there came a still small voice." The Lord is there!* He is proclaiming Himself the prophet's God! with him in the depths of that howling wilderness, as He had been with him on the heights of Carmel. *"And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his*

face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave." (1 Kings xix. 12, 13.)

Shall we go for illustration of the same truth to New Testament and gospel times?

The disciples are tossed with storm in the Sea of Tiberias. The voice of a *living* Saviour proclaims His *name.* "*It is I* (lit. I AM); *be not afraid!*" The assurance, in that night of gloom and tempest, lulls their trembling spirits to rest.

John, in Patmos, beheld, in a vision of surpassing brightness, his Lord arrayed in the lustres of exalted humanity. Overpowered by the glory which unexpectedly burst upon him, "he fell at His feet as one dead." His misgivings are stilled; his confidence and hope restored, by the proclamation of a *living* Saviour-God. "*I am He that* LIVETH" (lit. THE LIVING ONE)—and a similar comforting symbol was given him in a subsequent vision, when he saw that same covenant angel "ascending from the east, having the seal of the *Living* God." (Rev. i. 18, and vii. 2.)

This was "the *living* Jehovah" whom David now sought in the forest-depths of Gilead. He goes out to that solitude to meditate and pray. But it is no

dream of earthly conquest that occupies him. Deeper thoughts have taken possession of his soul than the loss of a kingdom and the forfeiture of a crown! A fiercer battle engrosses his spirit than any mortal conflict. "Let me have God," he seems to say, "as the strength of my heart and my portion for ever, and I heed not other portions besides." At another time that lover of nature would have caught inspiration from the glories of the impressive sanctuary around. He would have sung of the water-brooks at his side, the trees bending in adoration, the rocky gorges through which Jordan fretted his tortuous way, the everlasting hills of Hermon and Lebanon,—the silent guardians of the scene,—"the wild beasts of the forest creeping forth" and "seeking their meat from God." But now he has but one thought—one longing—"THOU *art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey.*" (Ps. lxxvi. 4.) None was more dependent on the realised consciousness of the Divine favour than he. His Psalms seem to utter the language of one who lived in God's presence, and to whom the withdrawal of that endearing intercourse and communion would be death indeed. His expressions, in these holy breathings

of his soul to the Father of spirits, seem like those of one loving friend to another. God, the abstraction of the Philosopher, has no place in his creed. He speaks of "the Lord thinking upon him," "putting his tears into His bottle," "guiding him with His eye," "His right hand upholding him," he himself "rejoicing under the shadow of His wings;" and as if he almost beheld some visible, tangible form, such as Peter gazed upon when the question was put to him on the shore of Gennesaret, "Lovest thou me?" we hear this warm, impulsive Peter of Old Testament times thus avowing his personal attachment—"*I will love thee, O Lord my strength;*" "*I love the Lord, because He hath heard my voice and my supplications;*" "*The Lord* LIVETH; *and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.*"

Reader, do you know what it is thus to exult in God as a *living God?* Not to think of Him as some mysterious Essence, who, by an Almighty fiat, impressed on matter certain general laws, and, retiring into the solitude of His own being, left these to work out their own processes. But is there joy to you in the thought of God ever nigh, compassing

your path and your lying down? Do you know of ONE, brighter than the brightest radiance of the visible sun, visiting your chamber with the first waking beam of the morning; an eye of infinite tenderness and compassion following you throughout the day; a hand of infinite love guiding you, shielding you from danger, and guarding you from temptation—the "Keeper of Israel," who "neither slumbers nor sleeps?"

And if gladdening it be, at all times, to hear the footsteps of this living God, more especially gladdening is it, as, with the Exile-King of Israel, in the season of trial, to think of Him and to own Him, in the midst of mysterious dealings, as One who personally loves you, and who chastises you *because* He loves you. The world, in their cold vocabulary, in the hour of adversity, speak of *Providence,* "the will of *Providence,*" "the strokes of *Providence.*" PROVIDENCE! What is that? Why dethrone a living God from the sovereignty of His own world? Why substitute a cold, death-like abstraction in place of a living One, an acting One, a controlling One, and (to as many as He loves) a rebuking One and a chastening One? Why forbid the angel of bereavement

to drop from his wings the balmy fragrance, "Thy Father hath done it?" How it would take the sting from many a goading trial thus to see, as Job did, nothing but the hand of God—to see that hand behind the gleaming swords of the Sabeans, the flash of the lightning, and the wings of the whirlwind—and to say like David, on the occasion of his mournful march to these very wilds of Gilead, "*I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because* THOU *didst it.*" (Psalm xxxix. 9.)

The thought of a living God forms the happiness of Heaven. It is the joy of Angels. It forms the essence and bliss of glorified Saints. The redeemed multitude, while on earth, "*thirsted*" for the living God, but they had then only some feeble foretastes of His presence. They sipped only some tiny rills flowing from the Everlasting Fountain; now they have reached the living spring; and the long-drawn sigh of the earthly valley is answered—"When shall we come and *appear before God?*"

And what this living God is to the Church above, He is also to the Church below. In one sense we need Him more! The drooping, pining plant, battered down by rain, and hail, and tempest, stands

more in need of the fostering hand and genial sunbeam than the sturdy tree whose roots are firmly moored in the soil, or sheltered from the sweep of the storm. Pilgrims in the Valley of Tears! seek to live more under the habitual thought of God's presence. In dark passages of our earthly history we know how supporting it is to enjoy the sympathy of kindred *human* friends. What must it be to have the consciousness of the presence, and support, and nearness of the Being of all beings; when some cherished "light of the dwelling" is put out, to have a better light remaining, which sorrow cannot quench! All know the story of the little child who, in simple accents, quieted its own fears and that of others in the midst of a storm. When the planks were creaking beneath them—the hoarse voice of the thunder above mingling with that of the raging sea; —his tiny finger pointed to the calm visage of the pilot, who was steering with brawny arm through the surge, "*My father,*" said he, "*is at the helm!*" Would you weather the tempests of life, and sit calm and unmoved amid "the noise of its many waters," let your eye rest on a *living God*—a loving Father—a heavenly Pilot. See Him guiding the

Vessel of your temporal and eternal destinies! Let Faith be heard raising her triumphant accents amid the pauses of the storm—"*O Lord our God, who is a strong Lord like unto Thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea; when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them.*" (Psalm lxxxix. 9.)

Above all, be it yours to enjoy what David knew imperfectly, the conscious nearness of a living SAVIOUR,—a Brother on the throne of Heaven—"*Christ our life*"—God in our nature—"the man Christ Jesus,"—susceptible of every human sympathy—capable of entering, with infinite tenderness, into every human want and woe—bending over us with His pitying eye—marking out for us our path—ordering our sorrows—filling or emptying our cup—providing our pastures, and "making all things work together for our good!" The words at this moment are as true as when, eighteen hundred years ago, they came fresh from His lips in Patmos—"I am *the living* One! —Behold, I am *alive* for evermore!" (Rev. i. 18.)

What is the great lesson from this meditation? Is it not to strive to *be like God?* What does "thirsting" for God mean, but a longing of the

soul after likeness and conformity to the Divine image? Let us not lose the deep truth of the text under the material emblem. To thirst for God is to desire His fellowship; and we can only hold fellowship with a congenial mind. No man is ever found to covet the companionship of those whose tastes, likings, pursuits, are opposed to his own. Place one whose character is scarred with dishonour and his life with impurity, introduce him into the company of high-souled men—spirits of sterling integrity and unblemished virtue, who would recoil from the contaminating touch of vice, who would scorn a lie as they would a poisoned dart—he *could* not be happy; he would long to break away from associates and associations so utterly distasteful and uncongenial. No man can thirst after God who is not aiming after assimilation to His character. God is HOLY. He who thirsts for God must be athirst for *holiness*—he must scorn impurity in all its forms, in thought, word, and deed. He who longs for the pure cistern must turn with loathing from the muddy pools of earth and sin. Again, God is LOVE. Love is pencilled by Him on every flower, and murmured in every breeze. The world is re-

sonant with chimes of love, and Calvary is love's crowning triumph and consummation. He who "thirsts for God" "in him verily is the *love* of God perfected." He must have the lineaments in outline, at least, of a loving nature. He must hate all that is selfish, delight in all that is beneficent, and seek an elevating satisfaction in being the minister of love to others. "*He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*"

And what shall be said to those who know nothing of this thirst for God,—to whom all that is here written is but as an idle tale? You may pant not for Him. You may have no spiritual thirst for Him—no longing for His presence —no aspiration after His likeness. But still He is to you, as to the believer, a LIVING God. Yes—scorner of His mercy! ignore the truth as you may, the God to whom you are responsible,—the God with whom you will yet have "to do," *that* God LIVES! His eye is upon you—His book is open—His pen is writing—the indelible page is filling! You may see no trace of His footstep. You may hear no tones of His voice. His very mercy and

forbearance may be misconstrued by you, as if it indicated on His part indifference to His word and forgetfulness of your sin. You may lull yourselves into the atheist dream, that the world is governed by blind chance and fate, that His heaven and His hell are the forged names and nullities of credulity and superstition. As you see the eternal monuments of His power and glory on rock and mountain, you may affect to see in these only the dead hieroglyphics of the past—the obsolete tool-marks of the God of primeval chaos, who welded into shape the formless mass, but having done so, left it alone. The scaffolding is removed, the Architect has gone to uprear other worlds, and abandoned the completed globe to the control of universal laws!

Nay—GOD LIVES! "He is not far from any one of us." He is no Baal divinity, "asleep or taking a journey." The volume of every heart is laid open to the eye of the great Heart-searcher, and vainly do you seek to elude His scrutiny. Terrible thought! this *living* God *against* you! *You* living, and content to live His enemy! rushing against the bosses of His buckler! and if you were to die, it would be in the attitude of one *fighting against God!*

No longer scorn His grace or reject His warnings. He is living; but, blessed be His name, He is living and waiting to be gracious! You may be as stranded vessels on the sands of despair; but the tide of His ocean-love is able to set you floating on the waters. Repair, without delay, to His mercy-seat. Cast yourselves on His free forgiveness. Every attribute of His nature which you have now armed against you, is stretching out its hand of welcome and entreaty. Each is like a branch of the tree of life, inviting you to repose under its shadow. Each is a rill from the everlasting fountain, inviting you to drink of the unfailing stream.

See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. He who unlocked that fountain is even now standing by it, and saying, as He contrasts it with all earth's polluted cisterns, "*Whosoever drinketh of* THIS *water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*"

IV.

The Taunt.

"'Wilt thou leave me thus,' I cried,
'Whelm'd beneath the rolling tide?'
Ah! return and love me still;
See me subject to Thy will;
Frown with wrath, or smile with grace,
Only let me see Thy face!
Evil I have none to fear,
All is good, if THOU art near.
King, and Lord, whom I adore,
Shall I see Thy face no more?"

—*Madame Guyon.*

"There is a persecution sharper than that of the axe. There is an iron that goes into the heart deeper than the knife. Cruel sneers, and sarcasms, and pitiless judgments, and cold-hearted calumnies—these are persecution."

"My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"—*Verse* 3.

IV.

THE TAUNT.

We are called, in this chapter, to contemplate a new experience—David in tears! These, his tears, brought sin to his remembrance. As, in looking through the powerful lens of a microscope, the apparently pellucid drop of water is found to be the swarming haunt of noxious things,—fierce animalculæ devouring one another; so the tears of the Exile formed a spiritual lens, enabling him to see into the depths of his own soul, and disclosing, with microscopic power, transgressions that had long been consigned to oblivion.

Ten years of regal prosperity had elapsed since the prophet Nathan, the minister of retribution, stood before him, in his Cedar Palace, with heavy tidings regarding himself and his house. Time may have dimmed the impressions of that meeting. He may have vainly imagined, too, that it

had modified the Divine displeasure. Now that his head was white with sixty winters, he may have thought that God would exempt him from further merited chastisement, and suffer him to go down to his grave in peace. But the day of reckoning, which the Divine patience had long deferred, had now come. He was called to see the first gleamings of that sword which the anointed prophet had told him would "never depart from his house." (2 Sam. xii. 10.) The voice of long averted judgment is at last heard amid the thickets and caves of Gilead,—"*These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*" (Ps. l. 21.) Nature, in her august solitudes, echoed the verdict! The waters murmured it—the winds chanted it—the forest wailed it—the thunders rolled it—and the tears of the lonely Exile himself wept it,—"*Be sure your sin will find you out!*" As he sat by the willows of Jordan, with his crownless head and aching heart, he could say, in the words of an older Psalmist, "*We are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniqui-*

ties before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." (Ps. xc. 7, 8.)

How apt are we to entertain the thought that God will wink at sin; that He will not be rigidly faithful to His denunciations—unswervingly true to His word. Time's oblivion-power succeeds in erasing much from the tablets of *our* memories. We measure the Infinite by the standard of the finite, and imagine something of the same kind regarding the Great Heart-Searcher. Sin, moreover, seldom is, in this world, *instantaneously* followed with punishment; "sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily;" and the long-suffering patience and forbearance of the Almighty is presumptuously construed by perverse natures into alteration or fickleness in the Divine purpose. But "*God is not a man that He should lie!*" Even in this our present probation state, (oftener than we suppose,) the time arrives for solemn retribution; when He makes bare His arm to demonstrate by what an inseparable law in His moral government He has connected *sin* with *suffering*.

A new missile pierces this panting, wounded Hart on the mountains of Israel. *One* of those who

hurled the Javelin is specially mentioned in the sacred narrative. His poisoned dart must have been rankling in David's soul when he penned this Psalm.

When the King was descending the eastern slopes of *Olivet,* on his way to the Valley of Jordan, Shimei, a Benjamite of Bahurim, of the house of Saul, came out against him, "*and,*" we read, "*cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of King David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed him as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.*" (2 Sam. xvi. 5–8, 13.) Besides this son of Gera, there were many obsequious flatterers and sycophants at Jerusalem—men once his

cringing adherents, loud with their hosannahs in the time of his prosperity—who had now turned against him in his adversity, and become the partisans of the usurper. They exulted over his downfall, and followed him to the place of exile with the taunting cry, "Where is now thy God?" "*Mine enemies,*" said he, "*speak against me; and they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together, saying,* GOD *hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.*" (Psalm lxxi. 10, 11.)

There is no trial keener, no anguish of soul intenser than this. Let not any talk of taunt and ridicule being a trivial and insignificant thing—unworthy of thought. Let not any say that the believer, entrenched in a lordly castle—the very fortress of God—should be above the shafts hurled from the bow of envy, or the venomous arrows from the tongue of the scoffer. It is often *because* the taunt is contemptible that it is hardest to bear. The sting of the adder rouses into fury the lordly lion. The tiniest insect blanches the colour of the loveliest flower, and causes it to hang its pining head. Sorrow is in itself difficult of endurance, but bitter is the aggravation when others are ready to

make a jest of our sorrows. *No water* is bad enough to the fainting pilgrim, but worse is it when he is mocked by the mirage or bitter pool.

All the more poignant, too, were these taunts in the case of David, because too well did he know that such reproaches were merited,—that he himself had furnished his enemies with the gall and the wormwood that had been mingled in his cup. The dark, foul blots of his past life, he had too good reason to fear, were now emboldening them to blaspheme. He had for years been "the Sweet Singer of Israel;"—his future destiny was the Psalmist of the universal Church. His sublime appeals, and fervent prayers, and holy musings, were to support, and console, and sustain till the end of time. Millions on millions, on beds of pain, and in hours of solitude and times of bereavement, were to have their faith elevated, their hopes revived, their love warmed and strengthened by listening to the harp of the Minstrel King. And now, as his faith begins to languish, now as a temporary wave of temptation sweeps him from his footing on the Rock, and the "Beloved of God" wanders an exile and outcast,—a shout is raised by those who were strangers to all

his sublime sources of consolation—"*Where is now thy God?* Where is He whom thou hast sung of as the help of the godly, the refuge of the distressed? Where, uncrowned one! is the answer to thy prayers? Where is He of whom thou didst boast as being known in all thy Zion palaces as a refuge? Thou hast taught others and taught thyself to believe a lie. O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou fallen!"

For the moment, this crushing sarcasm can be answered by nothing but a flood of anguished tears. He was below the wave; and though he was soon to know that below that wave there was an Arm lower still, yet for the present he was dumb under the averment. There was no light in the cloud. He was unable to lay hold of a former comforting experience—"THOU *hast known my soul in adversities.*" (Psalm xxxi. 7.)

Oh, how jealous we should be of anything that would reduce us so low as this, and give a handle to the adversary! Beware of religious inconsistency. *One* fatal step, one unguarded *word* may undo a lifetime of hallowed influence. One scar on the character, one blot on the page of the living epistle

is indelible. It may be washed away, indeed, by the blood of sprinkling, so that nothing of it will remain against you in the book of God; but the eye and memory of the world, keen to watch and treasure the inconsistencies of God's people, will not so easily forgive or forget! The Hart laid itself open to the toils of the huntsman. It was hit by the archers. One fierce dart of temptation sped with unerring aim. It has left the track of blood behind it in the glades of the forest—the unbelieving world hounds in remorseless pursuit, and the taunting cry will follow to the grave!

Are there any who feel that the experience of David is their own,—who either by reason of religious inconsistency or religious declension have laid themselves open to the upbraiding question, "*Where is thy God?*"—Perhaps *religious declension* is the more common of the two. You are not, as we have surmised in a previous chapter, what once you were. You have not the same love of the Saviour as once you had—the same confidence in His dealings—the same trust in His faithfulness—the same zeal for His glory. Affliction, when it comes, does not lead you, as once it did, to cheerful acquiescence—to the

cherishing of a meek, unmurmuring submissive spirit under God's sovereign will and discipline, but rather to a hasty, misgiving frame—fretting and repining when you should be prostrate at the mercy-seat, saying, "*The will of the Lord be done!*"

Not in scorn, but in sober seriousness, in Christian affection and fidelity, we ask, "*Where is now thy God?*" "Ye *did* run well; who hath hindered you?" What is the guilty cause, the lurking evil, that has dragged you imperceptibly down from weakness to weakness, and has left you a poor, baffled thing, with the finger of irreligious scorn pointed at you, and whose truthfulness is echoed back from the lonely voids of your desolate heart? Return, O backsliding children! Remain no longer as you are, at this guilty distance from that God who, amid all the fitfulness of your love to *Him*, remains unaltered and unalterable in His love to *you*. Be not absorbed in tears, wringing your hands in moping melancholy—abandoning yourself to unavailing remorse and despair. The past may be bad enough! You may have done foul dishonour to your God. By some sad and fatal inconsistency, you may have given occasion to the ungodly to point

at you the finger of scorn. The fair alabaster pillar may be stained with some crimson transgression. Or if there be no special blot to which they can point, there may be a lamentable spiritual deterioration in your daily walk. They may have observed your love to God waxing cold—your love of the world waxing strong. They may have heard you murmur at your Lord's dealings, question His faithfulness, and refuse to hear and to bear the rod—manifesting tempers, or indulging in pursuits sadly and strangely unlike what would be sanctioned by the example of your Divine Redeemer. Up! and with determined energy resolve henceforth to repair the breach,—henceforth to make a new start in the heavenly life. The shrill trumpet sounds—"*Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life!*" We cannot say, like the King of Nineveh, "*Who can tell if God will turn and repent?*" *He* has never turned! *You* have turned from Him, not He from *you.* "*Where is now thy God?*" He is the same as ever He was;—boundless in His compassion—true to His covenant—faithful to His promises; "*the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever!*"

Reader! if He be afflicting you as He did David;—if with an exile spirit you be roaming some moral wilderness, the flowers of earth faded on your path, and the bleak winds of desolation and calamity sweeping and sighing around, let these times of affliction lead to deep searchings of heart. Let your tears be as the dewdrops of the morning on the tender leaves, causing you to bend in lowly sorrow and self-abasement, only to be raised again, refreshed, to inhale new fragrance in the summer sun. If, like the weeping woman of Galilee, you are saying, through blinding tears, "*They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him,*" —if, like the Spouse in the Canticles, you are going about the city in search of your Beloved;—seeking Him, He will be found of you. The watchmen may smite you—repel you—tear off your veil—and load you with reproaches;—but "*fear not! ye seek Jesus who was crucified!*" He will meet you as He did the desponding Magdalene, and, listening like her to His own tones of ineffable love, you will cast yourself at His feet, and exclaim, "RABBONI—MASTER!"

V.

The Taunt.

"He wounds, and hides the hand that gave the blow;
He flies, He reappears, and wounds again;
Was ever heart that loved thee treated so?
Yet I adore Thee, though it seem in vain."

—*Cowper.*

"Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none."—*Psalm* lxix. 7, 8, 20.

"My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?"—*Verse* 3.

V.

THE TAUNT.

The Great Accuser of the brethren in a variety of ways attempts to insinuate the same dark doubts in the minds of believers, which we have spoken of in the preceding pages. He tries to shake their confidence in God,—in the veracity of His word, and the faithfulness of His dealings. He would lead them to discover in His providential dispensations what is inconsistent with His revealed character and will. In seasons particularly of outward calamity and trouble, when the body is racked with pain, its nerves unstrung, or its affections blighted and wounded—when the mind is oppressed and harassed, the soul in darkness—the Prince of this world, who times his assaults with such consummate skill, not unfrequently gains in such seasons a temporary triumph. The shadow of a cold scepticism passes over the soul. It is silent under the cry, "*Where is thy God?*"

Have any of you ever known this acutest anguish of the human spirit,—those appalling moments of doubt, when for a moment the whole citadel of truth seems to rock to its foundations,—when the soul becomes a dungeon with grated bars, or in which the light of heaven is transmitted through distorted glass, and the finger of unbelief is pointed inwards, with the old sneer, "Where is the God you were wont to boast of in your day of prosperity? Where is there evidence that one prayer you ever offered has been heard—one blessing you ever supplicated been granted—one evil you ever deprecated been averted or removed? Where one evidence of His hand in your allotments in life? These heavens have never broken silence! Hundreds of years have elapsed since His voice was last heard. Moreover, you have only some old parchment leaves written by converted Pharisees and Galilean fishermen to tell that Deity ever gave audible utterances out of the thick darkness. May not His very *being* be after all a fiction, a delusion—His Bible a worn-out figment which superstition and priestcraft have successfully palmed upon the world? Or if you do believe in a God and in a written revelation, have you not good reason, at

all events, to infer from His adverse dealings that He cares nothing for *you*. He has proved Himself deaf to your cries. Where is the mercy in such an affliction as yours? He has crossed your every scheme, blasted your fairest gourds. His appointments are surely arbitrary. He takes useful lives, and leaves useless ones. He takes the wheat, and leaves the chaff. The chairs he empties are those of the kind and good, the loving and beloved. He leaves the wicked, and proud, and selfish, and profligate. Can there be a God on the earth? Where is the justice and judgment which are 'the habitation of His throne'—where the 'mercy and the truth' that are said to 'go before His face?'"

Such, you may say, are awful imaginations—too awful to speak of. But such there are! It is the horror of great darkness—spirits from the abyss sent to trouble the pools of ungodly thought, and stir them from their depths.

Ye who are thus assaulted, do you ever think, in the midst of these horrible insinuations, of ONE who had to bear the same? Think of that challenge which wrung a spotless human soul in the hour of its deepest anguish—"*He trusted on the Lord that He*

would deliver him: let Him deliver him, seeing he delighted in Him." (Ps. xxii. 8.) It was the same taunt in *His* case as in yours! It was the cruel, poignant sneer, that He had, during all his lifetime of confiding filial love, been trusting to a falsehood, —that if God had really been His Father and He His Son, ten thousands of legions of angels would have been down now by the side of His cross to unbind His cords and set the Victim free!

Let the merciful, the wondrous forbearance of Christ be a lesson to ourselves in the endurance of the taunts of a scornful world and of the Father of lies. How easily might He have resented and answered the challenge by a descent from the cross, by having the pierced feet and hands set free,—the crown of thorns replaced by a diadem of glory, scattering the scoffing crew like chaff before the whirlwind! But in meek, majestic silence the Lamb of God suffers Himself to be bound, the Victim gives no struggle. Let them scoff on! He will save others, Himself he will not save! Nor did all their scoffing, their taunts and ridicule, tend for a solitary moment to shake His confidence in His heavenly Father. These fell like spent spray on the Rock of Ages. When

the cup of trembling was in His hands, sinking humanity for the moment seemed to stagger. He breathed the prayer, "*Let it pass from me.*" But immediately He added the condition of unswerving *filial trust*, "*Nevertheless, O my Father, not as* I *will, but as* THOU WILT." Even in the crisis of all, when He was mourning the eclipse of that Father's countenance—in that last gasp of superhuman agony, He proclaims, in answer to the taunts of earth and hell, His unshaken trust, "MY GOD, MY GOD!"

Comforting surely to the reviled, the ridiculed, and persecuted, that, severe and poignant as their sorrow is, they are undergoing only what their Lord and Master, in an inconceivably more awful form, experienced before them! Yes! think how HE had to encounter the ingratitude of faithless, the treachery of trusted friends. The limbs He healed brought no succour—the tongues He unloosed lisped no accents of compassion—the eyes He unsealed gave no looks of love. Those lips that spake as never man spake, dropping wherever they went balm-words of mercy, now in vain make the appeal to the scoffing crowd, "*Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me!*" Oh, when

in deeper than the water-floods of Gilead, this wounded HART of Heaven lay panting and bleeding under the curse,—when arrow after arrow was poured upon Him from the shafts of men, and the bitter cry resounded in His dying ears, *Where is thy God?*—how did He answer? what was His response? Listen to the apostle's sublime comment on that scene of blended love and suffering—"*Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He* THREATENED NOT; BUT COMMITTED HIMSELF TO HIM THAT JUDGETH RIGHTEOUSLY."

As the face, the hidden face of God, beamed upon the Son of His love in the midst of that apparent desolation, so will it be, children of affliction and sorrow! with you. Others may see in your tears nothing but an indication of the desertion of God, —the visitations of His wrath and judgment. But believe it, these very experiences of trouble and calamity, of bereavement or death, are all meted out and apportioned for you in love—drop by drop, tear by tear. Seek to see God's hand in all that befalls you. Try, even in the most adverse providences, to rise above second causes. Be it with you as with David in his conduct towards Shimei. When the

insulting Benjamite was hurling these cruel taunts against the exiled King and the sorrowing Father, —when his incensed soldiers, burning with indignation, were on the point of drawing their swords and inflicting summary vengeance on the scoffer—"*Why should this dead dog,*" said Abishai, "*curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head*"—David's reply is, "Nay! I hear not that man's voice—I see not that man's face—my eye is above the human instrument, on the God who sent him—'*Let him curse on, for the Lord hath bidden him.*'" (2 Sam. xvi. 11.)

Trust God in the dark. Ah! it is easy for us to follow Him and to trust Him in sunshine. It is easy to follow our Leader as Israel did the pillar-cloud, when a glorious pathway was opened up for them through the tongue of the Red Sea—when they pitched under shady palms and gushing fountains, and heaven rained down bread on the hungry camp. But it is not so easy to follow when fountains fail and the pillar ceases to guide, and all outward and visible supports are withdrawn. But *then* is the time for faith to rise to the ascendant;—when the world is loud with its atheist sneer, THEN

is the time to manifest a simple, child-like trust, and, amid baffling dispensations and frowning providences, to exclaim, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!*'

Yes—"*troubled,* we are NOT distressed; *perplexed,* we are NOT in *despair; persecuted,* we are NOT *forsaken; cast down,* we are NOT *destroyed.*" We ARE ready, scoffing world! to answer the question, *Where is thy God?*

CHILD OF SICKNESS! bound down for years on that lonely pillow!—the night-lamp thy companion—disease wasting thy cheeks and furrowing thy brow—weary days and nights appointed thee—tell me, *Where is thy God?* He is here, is the reply; His presence takes loneliness from my chamber and sadness from my countenance. His promises are a pillow for my aching head,—they point me onwards to that better land where "the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick!"

CHILD OF POVERTY! *Where is thy God?* Can He visit this rude dwelling? Can God's promises be hung on these broken rafters? Can the light of His word illumine that cheerless hearth and sustain that bent figure shivering over its smouldering ashes?

Yes! He is here. The lips of Truth that uttered the beatitude, "*Blessed be ye poor,*" have not spoken in vain. Bound down by chill penury—forsaken and forgotten in old age—no footstep of mercy heard on my gloomy threshold—no lip of man to drop the kindly word—no hand of succour to replenish the empty cupboard—that God above has not deserted me. He has led me to seek and lay up my treasure in a home where want cannot enter, and where the beggar's hovel is transformed into the kingly mansion!

Bereaved One! *Where is thy God?* Where is the arm of Omnipotence thou wast wont to lean upon? Has *He* forgotten to be gracious? Has He mocked thy prayers, by trampling in the dust thy dearest and best, and left thee to pine and agonise in the bitterness of thy swept heart and home? Nay, He is *here!* He has swept down my fondest idol, but it was in order that He himself might occupy the vacant seat. I know Him too well to question the faithfulness of His word, and the fidelity of His dealings. I have never known what a God He was, till this hour of bitter trial overtook me! There was a "need be" in every tear—every death-bed—every grave!

Dying Man! the billows are around thee—the world is receding—the herald symptoms of approaching dissolution are gathering fast around thy pillow—the soul is pluming its wings for the immortal flight; ere memory begins to fade, and the mind becomes a waste,—ere the names of friends, when mentioned, will only be answered by a dull, vacant look, and then the hush of awful silence,—tell me, ere the last lingering ray of consciousness and thought has vanished, *Where is thy God?*

He is here! I feel the everlasting arms underneath and round about me. Heart and flesh are failing. The mists of death are dimming my eyes to the things below, but they are opening on the magnificent vistas of eternity. Yonder He is! seated amid armies of angels. "*My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God!*" "This God shall be my God for ever and ever!"

VI.

Sabbath Memories.

"Dear is the Sabbath morn to me,
When village bells awake the day,
And with their holy minstrelsy
Call me from earthly cares away.

"And dear to me the winged hour,
Spent in thy hallow'd courts, O Lord,
To feel devotion's soothing power,
And catch the manna of Thy Word.

"And dear to me the loud 'Amen,'
That echoes through the blest abode—
That swells, and sinks, and swells again,
Dies on the ear—but lives to God.

"Oft when the world, with iron hand,
Has bound me in its six days' chain,
This bursts them, like a strong man's band,
And bade my spirit live again."

"And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation."—2 *Sam.* xv. 25.

"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day.—*Verse* 4.

VI.

SABBATH MEMORIES.

We always commiserate those who have seen better days. Poverty, indeed, under any form, appeals with irresistible power to the sympathies of our better nature. The most heartless and indifferent cannot refuse the tribute of pity to the ragged beggar shivering on the street, or seated in his hovel by the ashes of a spent fire, brooding over a wretched past, with the grim spectral forms of want hovering over a miserable future.

Sad, however, as the condition of such may be, habit, in one sense, may have become to that squalid pauper a second nature. He may never have known a more prosperous state. He may have been inured from his earliest years to buffet life's wintry storm. Chill penury may have rocked his cradle, and ever since sung her rude lullaby over his pallet of straw. Far more is to be pitied the case of those who have sunk from comfort into indigence, around whose

early home no bleak winds of adversity ever blew, who were once pillowed in the lap of plenty if not of luxury, but who, by some sudden wave of calamity, have become wrecks on life's desert shore. If there be one being on God's earth more to be pitied than another, it is the mother of a once joyous home, turned adrift, in the hour of her widowhood, with her ragged children;—forced to sing, from door to door, to escape the jaws of hungry famine,—ill disguising, under her heap of squalid rags or her trembling notes of sorrow and despair, the story of brighter days.

Similar is the commiseration we extend (let the shores of this Refuge Island of ours bear testimony) to the hapless patriot or the fallen monarch. These may have been hurled from positions of influence or pinnacles of glory more by their crimes than by their misfortunes. The revolutionary wave that swept them from their country or their thrones may have been a just retribution for misrule; but it is their hour of adversity! They have seen better and more auspicious times. Pity for the fallen knocks, and never knocks in vain, at the heart of a great nation's sympathies.

Such was David's position at this time. Denied the sympathy of others, his own soul is filled with recollections of a far different past. The monarch of Israel, the beloved of God, the idol of his people; now a fugitive from his capital—his palace sacked—his crown dishonoured—wandering in ignoble exile—a wreck of vanished glory!

But it is not these features of his humiliating fall on which his mind mainly dwells. It is not the thought of his sceptre wrested from his grasp—his army in mutiny—his royal residence a den of traitors—that fills his soul with most poignant sorrow. He is an exile from the House of God! The joy of his old Sabbaths is for the time suspended and forfeited. No more is the sound of silver trumpets heard summoning the tribes to the new moons and solemn feast-days! No more does he behold, in thought, the slopes of Olivet studded with pilgrim tents or made vocal with "songs in the night!" No more does he see the triumphant procession wending up the hill of Zion—timbrel and pipe and lute and voice celebrating in glad accord the high praises of God;—"the singers in front, and the players on instruments behind."—he himself, harp in hand, (the

true father of his people,) leading the jubilant chorus, and Jehovah commanding upon all "the blessing, even life for evermore!"

How changed! To this Sabbath-loving and Sabbath-keeping King nothing but the memory of these remained. "*When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day.*"

Jerusalem was the pride and glory of the Jew. Wherever he went, he turned to it as to his best and fondest home. The windows of Daniel's chamber were "open *towards Jerusalem.*" With his eye in the direction of the holy city, "*he kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*" (Dan. vi. 10.) Jonah was in the strangest of prisons. "The depths closed round about him, the weeds were wrapped about his head, and the earth with its iron bars." From "the belly of hell" he sent up his cry to God. "I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again *toward thy* HOLY TEMPLE." (Jonah ii. 2.) Captive Israel are seated, in mute despondency, by

the willowed banks of the streams of Babylon. The Euphrates (an ocean river compared with the tiny streams of Palestine) rolled past them. The city of the hundred gates rose, like a dream of giant glory, before their view, with its colossal walls, and towers, and hanging gardens. Yet what were they in the eyes of these exile spectators? *Shadows* of greatness in comparison with the city and temple of their fathers amid the hills of Judah! When their oppressors demanded of them a Hebrew melody, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion," they answered, through hot tears of sorrowful remembrance, "*How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*" (Ps. cxxxvii. 4.) So it was with David now. As a bird taken from its home in the forest and placed in a cage, refuses to warble a joyous note,—beats its plumage against the enclosing bars, and struggles to get free—so he seems to long for wings that he may flee away to the hallowed eaves of the sanctuary, and be at rest!

He himself, indeed, uses a similar figure. He tells us, in another Psalm, written on this same occasion, that so blessed did he feel those to be who enjoyed the privilege of "dwelling in God's house," and so

ardent was his longing to participate in their joy, that he half-envied the swallows who constructed their nests upon its roof. (Ps. lxxxiv.) He was not without his solaces in this season of reverse and calamity. He had many faithful adherents still clinging to him in his adversity. The best and bravest chieftains from the tribes on the other side of the Jordan supplied his drooping followers with the produce of their rich pasture lands. "*Shobi of Ammon, and Machir of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite*"—these brought, besides camp utensils, "*wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.*" (2 Sam. xvii. 27–29.) Glorious, too, was Nature's temple around him. Its pillars the mountains—the rocks its altar—the balmy air its incense—the range of Lebanon, rising like a holy of holies, with its reverend curtain of mist and cloud, and snowy Hermon towering in solemn grandeur above all, as the very throne of God! Yet what were these compared with JERUSALEM, the place of sacrifice, the

resting-place of the Shekinah-glory, the city of solemnities, "*whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord?*" (Ps. cxxii. 4.) This wounded Hart pants for the water-brooks of Zion; Nature's outer sanctuary had no glory to him, "by reason of the glory that excelleth." The God who dwelleth between the cherubim had "*chosen Zion, and desired it for His habitation,*" saying, "*This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*" (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14.) With the windows of his soul, like Daniel, thrown "open *towards Jerusalem,*" and his inner eye wistfully straining to its sunny heights, his ear catching the cadence of its festive throng, he seems to say, "*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.*" (Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6.)

Do we prize the blessing of our Sabbaths and our sanctuaries? can we say, with somewhat of the emphasis of this expatriated King—"ONE *thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of*

my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple?" Alas! when we are living in the enjoyment of blessings, too true it is that we have seldom a vivid sense of their value. He who is born in a free country, to whom slavery and oppression are strange words, seldom realises the priceless boon of liberty. But let him suddenly be made the victim of tyrant thraldom; let him feel the irons loading his body, or the worse than material shackles fettering liberty of thought and action, and how will the strains of freedom fall like heavenly music on his ear! When we are in the enjoyment of health and strength, how little do we prize the boon. But let us be laid on a bed of languishing; let the sick lamp flicker for weeks by the sleepless pillow; let the frame be so shattered that even the light tread of loving footsteps across the room quickens the beat of the throbbing brow. In waking visions of these lonely night-watches, how does the day of elastic vigour and unbroken health rise before us! how do we reproach ourselves that the boon was so long ungratefully forgotten and unworthily requited! A parent little knows the strength of the tie which binds

him to his child during the brief loan of a loved existence. He gets habituated to the winning ways, and loving words, and constant companionship. He comes to regard that little life as part of himself. He does not fully realise the blessing, because he has never dreamt of the possibility of its removal. But when the startling blow comes,—when death, in an unexpected moment, has severed the tie,—when his eye lights on the empty chair or the unused toy, —when the joyous footfall and artless prattling are heard no more,—then comes he to gauge all the depth and intensity of his affection, and to feel how tenderly (too tenderly !) that idol was enshrined in his heart of hearts !

So it is with religious privileges. In such a land as our own, in which, from our earliest infancy, we have been accustomed to a hallowed Sabbath, an open sanctuary, an unclasped and unforbidden Bible, we do not fully estimate the priceless value of the spiritual blessings bequeathed to us, because never have we felt the loss or the want of them. But go to some land of heathenism, where the exiled child of a British Christian home finds neither minister nor House of God. Go to the thousands who have be-

taken themselves to a voluntary exile amid American forests or Australian pastures. Or go to the lands of apostate Christendom, where the Bible is a sealed book, and religious liberty is an empty name; where souls thirsting for the living stream are compelled to drink from some adulterated cistern. Alas! many in such circumstances are content to sink into a listless indifference; cold and lukewarm at home, they are too ready to lapse into the chill of spiritual death abroad. But there are others who have not so readily obliterated the holiest records of the past. Ask many tired and jaded emigrants, conscious of nobler aspirations than this world can meet, what recollections, more hallowed than others, linger on their spirits? They will tell you it is the memory of the Sabbath rest and the Sabbath sanctuary; when, at the summons of the village bell, mountain and glen and hamlet poured forth their multitudes to the house of God; seated wherein, the burdens and anxieties, the cares and disquietudes of the work-day world were hushed and set aside, and in listening to the words of everlasting life, sorrows were soothed, faith was revived, and hope brightened. "*O God,*" their cry is, "*our flesh longeth for thee in a*

dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, so as we have seen Thee in the sanctuary." *

Let us seek to prize our means of grace while we have them. In a country which is the reputed palladium of liberty;—where the greatest of all liberty, the liberty of the truth, has been purchased by the blood of our fathers,—the time, we trust, with God's help, may never come when these bulwarks will be overthrown—when our sanctuaries will be closed—our Bibles proscribed—our Sabbaths blotted from the statute-book—and bigotry, in league with rampant infidelity, again forge the chain and rear the dungeon. But remember, that protracted sickness or disease may at any time overtake us, and debar us from the precious blessings of the *public* sanctuary. Yes! I say the *public* sanctuary. God's appointed ordinances can never be superseded or rendered obsolete by human substitutes. Some may urge that books now-a-days are better than any preaching;—that the press is more potent and eloquent than any living voice. But church or pulpit is not a thing of man's device.

* Psalm lxiii. 1, 2.

It is a divine institute. The speaker is an *ambassador* in his Master's name, charged with a vast mission from the court of high heaven, and the House of God is the appointed audience-chamber. God does not, indeed, (nay, far from it,) forsake "the dwellings of Jacob." The lowliest cottage-home may become a *Bethel,* with a ladder of love set between earth and heaven, traversed by ministering angels! The secluded sick-chamber may become a *Patmos,* bright with manifestations of the Redeemer's presence and grace! But, nevertheless, "*Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary.*" The promise remains, "I will make my people joyful in my *house of prayer.*" It is the solemn "trysting-place"—the pledged ground of covenant intercommunion. "THERE *I will meet with thee, and commune with thee from off my mercy-seat!*" "*The Lord loveth the gates of Zion!*" "*How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!*" *

Reader, let me ask, How stands it with you? Are you conscious of a reverential regard and attachment to God's holy place? Does the return of the Sabbath awake in your heart the old melody of this

* Ex. xxv. 22; Psalm lxxxvii. 2; Numb. xxiv. 5.

sweet singer of Israel,—"*This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it?*"* Do you go to the solemn assembly, not to hear the *messenger* but the *message;*—not to pay homage to a piece of dust, (the vilest and most degraded form of idolatry,) but feeling yourself a beggar in the sight of God, with a soul to save, and an eternity to provide for? Do you approach it as the *place of prayer,* over which the cloud hovers laden with spiritual blessings? Do you go to it as "*the house of God,*" seeking fellowship and communion with the Father of spirits; desiring that all its services—its devotions, and praises, and exhortations—may become hallowed magnets, drawing you nearer and binding you closer to the mercy-seat? Oh, let not the boon of Sabbath privileges degenerate into an empty form, the mere pageant of custom. Let the Sabbath hours be sacredly kept. Let their lessons be sacredly treasured. Let their close find you a Sabbath-day's journey nearer heaven. Let their hallowed fragrance follow you through the week. Let them be landmarks in the pilgrimage; towering behind you the further you go—like Alp piled on Alp, flushed

* Psalm cxviii. 24.

with roseate light, guiding and cheering you when low down in the valleys of trial and sorrow, and when called to descend the last and gloomiest Valley of all.

David is mourning, in the words which have given rise to these thoughts, over his altered Sabbath joys. It may be there are some reading these pages, who, though they know nothing like him of literal exile and banishment from the sanctuary, may yet be able painfully to participate in his feelings! They are seated, Sabbath after Sabbath, in their pews; their Bibles are in their hands—the living words of the preacher are sounding in their ears; but their experience may be best interpreted by the language of the Christian poet:—

"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?

"How blest the hours I once enjoy'd!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

Memory can travel back on Sabbaths and communion seasons when a sunshine of holy joy irradiated their spirits; when their Sabbath was one hallowed Emmaus-journey;—they, during its sanctuary-hours,

travelling side by side with Jesus, and He causing their hearts, as He did those of the disciples of old, to "burn within them." They were wont to come and depart, saying, "*This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.*" Now they feel that all is sorrowfully altered. They have comparatively no joy, as once they had, when the Sabbath morning dawns. When they seat themselves in church, there is no fervour in their praises —no earnestness in their prayers—no childlike teachableness in hearing. There is more criticising of the preacher than worshipping God. There is no living flame on the heart-altar; their befitting exclamation is that of the prophet, "*My leanness! my leanness!*" They are ready, in the bitterness of their spirits, to say, "*When I remember these things, my soul is poured out within me.*"

Sad it is to have *no* meat; but sad, too, when we *have* food and cannot enjoy it! Sad it is, as exiles in a strange land, to have no Sabbath-gates flung open to us, and no Sabbath-bells to welcome the day of God; but sadder still to have these solemn chimes within hearing;—to have our sanctuaries open, and faithful ministers proclaiming

the words of eternal life, and yet to listen with the adder's ear;—to listen as the dead in our churchyards listen to the tears and laments of the living!

What should be done in such a case as this? Trace the muddy and turgid stream to its source. Discover what earthly clouds are dimming the spiritual firmament, and hiding the shinings of the Divine countenance. Sin, in some shape or other, must be the fruitful cause. It may be some positive and persevered-in transgression; indulgence in which, shuts up the avenues of prayer, and denies all access to the mercy-seat. Or it may be some no less culpable sin of *omission*. That mercy-seat may have become unfrequented; the rank grass may be waving over its once beaten foot-road; the altar-fire languishing in the closet, must necessarily languish in the sanctuary too. How can the House of God be now fragrant with blessing, if the life is spent in guilty estrangement from *Him?* Religion cannot be worn as a Sabbath garment, if garments soiled with sin be worn throughout the week.

Self-exile from the joys of the sanctuary! return henceforth to God. If it be positive sin which is marring former blessedness, cast out the troubler in

Israel. If it be duties omitted, or perfunctorily discharged, return to former earnest-mindedness. Cultivate more filial nearness to the Hearer of prayer. Seek, on your bended knees, to obtain more tenderness of conscience regarding sin;—to have more longing aspirations after the beauties of holiness.

And *delay* not the return. By doing so, the growing languor and listlessness which is creeping over you, may settle into positive disrelish of God's house. Imitate the example of the Spouse in the Canticles, who, in mourning over similar spiritual declension, resolves on an *instantaneous* seeking of the forfeited presence of her Lord. "*Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?*"* Go with the words which this exile of Gilead employs in the sequel to this Psalm, written on the same occasion—"*O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto Thy holy hill, and to Thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.*"†

Yes! go, and prove what the God of the sanctuary can do in the fulfilment of His own promise. He

* Sol. Song i. 7. † Psalm xliii. 3, 4.

seems now to be saying, "Put me to the test." "*Prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*"* Every church is a *Peniel,* where God meets His people, as He met the patriarch of old at the brook Jabbok. Go and see what may be effected by *one* lowly, humble, seeking soul—some wrestling Jacob, who, like "a Prince," has "power with God, and prevails!" The lowliest tabernacle on earth is glorified as being the *House of God*—the dwelling-place of Omnipotence and Love—the hallowed "*home,*" where a loving Father waits to dispense to His children the garnered riches of His grace! The time may come when the holy and beautiful sanctuary where we worship may become a heap of ruins. The fire may lay it in ashes—the hand of man may raze it—the slower but surer hand of time may corrode its walls and crumble its solid masonry stone by stone; but as sure as it is God's own appointed treasure-house of spiritual mercies, may we not believe that there will be deathless spirits who will be able to point to it in connexion with imperishable memories,—"buildings of God,"

* Mal. iii. 10.

"eternal in the heavens," beyond the reach of human violence, and wasting elements, and corroding years! Does not the promise stand unrepealed in this Bible;—let it ever be the inscription on our temples of worship,—"*Of* ZION *it shall be said, This and that man was born in her; and the Highest himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there.*" *

Oh that ours may at last be the blessedness of that better Church above, which knows no banishment, no exile, no languor, no weariness;—where "the holy-day" is an eternal Sabbath;—the festive throng, "a multitude which no man can number"—the voice of joy and praise, "everlasting songs;"—where God's absence can never be deplored;—where He who now tendeth His temple-lamps on earth, feeding them day by day with the oil of His grace, removing the rust perpetually gathering over them by reason of their contact with sin, will, with the plenitude of His own presence, supersede all earthly luminaries, and ordinances, and sanctuaries;—for "*they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever!*"

* Psalm lxxxvii. 5, 6.

VII.

Hope.

"When the water-floods of grief
Round thy helpless head shall rise,
When there seemeth no relief,
Lift thy gaze to yonder skies;
There behold how radiantly
Beams the star of HOPE divine!
Yesterday it shone for thee,
And to-day it still shall shine.
Ask no aid the world can give,
LOOKING UNTO JESUS, *live!*"

"When I ask the question, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' I am ashamed of the answer that must be returned. What if property, credit, health, friends and relatives were all lost, thou hast a Father, a friend, an advocate, a comforter, a mansion, a treasure in heaven."—*Bishop Hall.*

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."—*Verse 5.*

VII.

HOPE.

TAKE the wings from a bird, and it is the most helpless of animals. Bring the eagle from his eyrie, and rob him of his plumage, and he who an hour before was soaring monarch of the sky, is more powerless than the worm crawling at his side, or than the bleating lamb that trembled and cowered under his shadow.

Such was David now. The wounded bird of Paradise flutters in the dust. The taunting cry everywhere assails him, "*Where is thy God?*" The future is a mournful blank, and the past is crowded with joyous and happy memories, which only aggravate and intensify the sorrows of the present.

But though soiled and mutilated, the wings of faith are not broken. He struggles to rise from his fall. In the verse we are now to consider, he plumes his pinions for a new flight. We found him a short

time before, making his tears a microscopic lens, looking through them into the depths of his own sorrowing and sinning heart. So long as he does so, there is ground for nothing but misgiving and despair. But he reverses the lens. He converts the microscope into a telescope. In self-oblivion, he turns the prospect-glass away from his own troubles and sorrows, his fitful frames and feelings, his days alike of sunshine and shade, to Him who is above all mutation and vicissitude. In this position, with his eye God-wards, he begins to interrogate his own spirit as to the unreasonableness of its depression. He addresses a bold remonstrance to guilty unbelief. In the preceding verse, he alluded to the dense multitude—the many thousands of Israel—he was wont to lead in person to the feasts of Zion. Now he is alone with one auditor—that auditor is HIMSELF. "*Why art thou cast down,* O MY SOUL?"

And what is his antidote? What is the balm and balsam he applies to his wounded spirit? "*Hope thou in God!*"

HOPE! Who is insensible to the music of that word? What bosom has not kindled under its utterance? Poetry has sung of it; music has war-

bled it; oratory has lavished on it its bewitching strains. Pagan mythology, in her vain but beautiful dreams, said that when all other divinities fled from the world, *Hope*, with her elastic step and radiant countenance and lustrous attire, lingered behind. HOPE! well may we personify thee, lighting up thy altar-fires in this dark world, and dropping a live coal into many desolate hearts; gladdening the sick-chamber with visions of returning health; illuminating with rays, brighter than the sunbeam, the captive's cell; crowding the broken slumbers of the soldier by his bivouac-fire, with pictures of his sunny home, and his own joyous return. HOPE! drying the tear on the cheek of woe! As the black clouds of sorrow break and fall to the earth, arching the descending drops with thine own beauteous rainbow! Ay, more, standing with thy lamp in thy hand by the gloomy realms of Hades, kindling thy torch at Nature's funeral pile, and opening vistas through the gates of glory!

If Hope, even with reference to present and finite things, be an emotion so joyous,—if uninspired poetry can sing so sweetly of its delights, what must be the *believer's* hope, the hope which has God

for its object, and heaven its consummation? How sweet that strain must have sounded from the lips of the exile Psalmist amid these glens of Gilead! A moment before, his sky is dark and troubled, but blue openings begin once more to tremble through the clouds. The mists have been hanging dense and thick, hiding out the water-brooks. But now the sun shines. They rise and circle in wreaths of fantastic vapour, disclosing to the wounded Hart "the springs in the valleys which run among the hills; which give drink to every beast in the field, and where the wild asses quench their thirst." The wilderness has become once more "a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." Rebuking his unworthy tears, Faith once more takes down her harp, and thus wakes its melodies,—"*I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I* HOPE." "*Let Israel* HOPE *in the Lord.*"*

And is it not well for us from time to time to open the gates of our own souls, and hold a similar consistory?—to make solemn inquisition with our hearts in their seasons of trouble and disquietude?

"*Why art thou cast down?*" Is it outward trial

* Psalm cxxx. 5, 7.

that assails thee? Has calamity abridged thy earthly comforts? Have the golden heaps thou mayest have been a lifetime in amassing, dissolved like a snow-wreath;—the waxen wings of capricious fortune, when thou wast soaring highest, melting like those of fabled Icarus of old, and bringing thee helpless to the ground? Or is it sickness that has dulled thine eye, paralysed thy limb, and ploughed its furrows on thy cheek; shutting out from thee the din of a busy world, and chaining thee down to a couch of languishing? Or is it the treachery of thy trusted friend that has wounded thee; blighting thine affections, crushing thy hopes, dashing thy cup of earthly bliss to the ground? Or is it bereavement that has made gaps in thy loved circle; torn away the fixtures which gave thy dwelling and life itself all its gladness and joy?

"HOPE *thou in* GOD." The creature has perished. God is imperishable! Thou mayest be saying in the bitterness of thy spirit, "*All these things are against me;*" there may be no gleam of light in the tempest, no apparent reason for the dark dispensation; you feel it is with stammering lips and

a misgiving heart you give utterance to the reluctant word, "Thy will be done." But, "*My soul, wait thou only upon God;*" (or, as Calvin translates this, "*Be silent* before God;") "*for my expectation is from Him.*"* "*Commit also thy way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass.*"† Here is the province of faith,—*implicit trust* in dark dealings. God brings His people into straits; sends often what is baffling and unaccountable, to lead them devoutly to say, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.*" Oh! beautiful is it thus to see HOPE sitting, like the sea-bird, calmly on the crested wave. While others (strangers to the peace of the gospel) are beating their breasts in tumultuous grief, indulging in wild paroxysms of rebellious sorrow,—beautiful is it to see the smitten one prostrate at the feet of the great CHASTENER, saying through tear-drops of resignation, "*Even so, Father; for so it seems good in Thy sight!*" Believe it, in the apparently rough voice of thy God there is, as in the case of Joseph to his brethren, tones of dissembled love, disguised utterances of affection — "*Although thou sayest thou canst not see Him, yet*

* Psalm lxii. 5. † Psalm xxxvii. 5.

judgment is before Him; therefore trust thou in Him."*

Besides, this lofty grace of HOPE requires stern discipline to bring it into exercise, and to develop its noble proportions. It is the child of tribulation. The Apostle thus traces its pedigree—"*Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience,* HOPE."† As there can be no rainbow in the natural heavens without the cloud, so Hope cannot span the moral firmament, with its triumphal arch, without the clouds of tribulation. As the mother eagle is said, when other expedients fail, to put a thorn in the side of her nest to urge her young brood to fly, so tribulation is the thorn which drives Hope to the wing.

"*And thou shalt yet praise Him.*" "YET!" We cannot venture to scan or measure that word. It may be after many bitter tears of sorrow;—it may be after many struggles with a murmuring heart;—many storms may still sweep—many hours of pining sickness may be endured—many a rough and thorny path may have to be trodden—the harp may be muffled in sadness to the last; but, "*at evening-time*

* Job xxxv. 14. † Rom. v. 3, 4.

it shall be light." There is a season infallibly coming when the fettered tongue shall be loosed—the lingering cloud dispelled—and faith's triumph complete; when, with regard to the very dispensation on earth which caused you so much perplexity, you will be able triumphantly to say, "*I know*" (yea, I SEE) "*that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.*"*

But your depression may proceed from a different cause. It may not be outer trial, but inward sources of disquietude, which are causing despondency and doubt. It may be thoughts regarding your *spiritual* condition. Latent corruption in a partially renewed and sanctified heart,—the power of remaining sin robbing you of your peace; at times leading you to question whether you have any real interest in Gospel blessings and Gospel hopes—whether you have not long ago quenched the strivings of the Holy Spirit by your impenitence and unbelief—whether your hopes of heaven may not after all be a shadowy delusive dream. "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*" Who, I ask, is teaching you to breathe out these penitential sighings after a

* Psalm cxix. 75.

happiness to which at present you feel you are a stranger? Who is it that is teaching you thus to interrogate yourself about the erring past? It is not *Nature's* work. If there be within you one true breathing after repentance and return, that secret aspiration is the work of that Spirit who, although He will not always strive, is hereby shewing you that He *is* striving still with *you!* Think of all that God hath done for you in the past, and is still willing to do. After the gift of His Son,—after such an expenditure of wrath and suffering on the head of a guiltless Surety, and all this that a way of reconciliation might be opened up, —think how dishonouring it would be to distrust either His ability or His willingness to save you. Having bestowed this greatest boon, He will "with Him also *freely* give you *all things.*" Turn away from self,—sinful self, righteous self, condemned self, —and direct your believing regards to Him who is "*the* HOPE *of Israel and the Saviour thereof.*" Keep your eye steadily fixed on the infinite grandeur of His finished work and righteousness. Look to Jesus and believe! Look to Jesus and live! Nay, more; as you look to Him, hoist your sails, and buffet man-

fully the sea of life. Do not remain in the haven of distrust, or sleeping on your shadows in inactive repose, or suffering your frames and feelings to pitch and toss on one another like vessels idly moored in a harbour. The religious life is not a brooding over emotions, grazing the keel of faith in the shallows, or dragging the anchor of hope through the oozy tide-mud, as if afraid of encountering the healthy breeze. Away! with your canvas spread to the gale, trusting in Him who rules the raging of the waters. The safety of the timid bird is to be on the wing. If its haunt be near the ground,—if it fly low,—it exposes itself to the fowler's net or snare. If we remain grovelling on the low ground of feeling and emotion, we shall find ourselves entangled in a thousand meshes of doubt and despondency, temptation and unbelief. "*But surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of* THAT WHICH HATH A WING" *—(marginal reading). "*They that wait (or hope) in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.*"†

HOPE strengthens and invigorates her pinions the

* Prov. i. 17. † Isaiah xl. 31.

higher she soars. She gathers courage from the past, and looks with eagle eye to the future. "*I know,*" says Paul, "*in whom I have believed,*" (hoped, or trusted,) "*and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him.*" "*I will hope continually,*" says David, "*and will yet praise Thee more and more.*" * Again, using a kindred emblem—the bird in the tempest rushing for shelter under the mother's wing—"*Thou hast* BEEN *my help,* THEREFORE *in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.*" †

Can such be said of the world's hopes? Does experience lead to repose in *them* with similar implicit confidence? *Hope*—the hope of earthly good, and earthly joy, and earthly happiness—is often (too often) the mirage of life; the bubble on the stream, tinted with evanescent glory, a flash of prismatic beauty, and then *gone!* Multitudes flock to this enchantress in her cave, and though mocked and duped, and mocked and duped again, still they haunt her oracle, and kiss her magic wand. She has built for them again and again air castles—turret on turret, buttress on buttress, gilded dome

* Psalm lxxi. 14. † Psalm lxiii. 7.

and glittering minaret, and these have melted like frost-work. But yet these Babel builders, with the same avidity as ever, return to the work, and again the fantastic battlements are piled high in mid air!

We do not condemn these noble aspirations and struggles of this noble emotion;—far from it. What would the world be without Hope? It is the oil which keeps its vast machinery in play; it is the secret of all success—the incentive to all enterprise. Annihilate hope, and you blot out a sun from the firmament. Annihilate hope, and the husbandman would forsake his furrow, the physician his patient, the merchant his traffic; the student would quench his midnight lamp; science would at this hour have been lisping its alphabet, and art and philosophy would have been in their infancy.

But this we say, that if so much is perilled on a peradventure;—if *hope*—the *ignis fatuus* of earth—be so greedily pursued,—why the cold and careless indifference regarding "the hope which maketh not ashamed"—the hope which is beyond the possibility of disappointment; promises which never fail; words which rest on a firmer and surer basis than the foundations of earth and the pillars of heaven?

Shall the disappointed hewer still go on patching the shivered and broken *earthly* cistern? Shall the man of science, undeterred by successive failures, pursue his unwearied analysis? Shall the merchant remain unbaffled by adverse markets that have drained his coffers, or successive storms that have stranded his vessels and wrecked his cargo? Shall the fragments of a brave army re-muster at the bugle call, and, amid dying comrades around and a shower of iron hail in front, return with undaunted hearts to the charge? Shall pining captives in a beleaguered garrison, pressed by famine, decimated by disease, outnumbered by force—shall these light their beacon-fires of *hope*, and sit to the last by their smouldering ashes, struggling on, either till calm endurance win its recompence, or until hope and life expire together? And shall the spiritual builder, or merchant, or soldier, be left alone coward and faint-hearted, and give way to unworthy distrust, or pusillanimous despair; and that, too, when the guarantees of *their* hope are so amazing? Listen to them! What words could be stronger? what pledges more inviolable? "IN HOPE *of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before*

*the world began."** *"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."*†

Oh, beautiful figure! Hope casts its anchor into the Rock of Ages within the veil. The ship may be tossing in the surging sea below, but a chain of everlasting love and grace links it to the throne of God.

I love to walk through the Bible, and gaze on its many delineations of *Hope*. It is a picture-gallery of this noble grace! As the great painters of the middle ages clung to favourite subjects, so HOPE seems ever to meet us in some form or other, as we tread this long corridor of inspired portraits.

Here is the earliest. A picture hung in a frame-work of sorrow. Its subject is two drooping exiles going with tears out of Eden. But, lo! a tinge of

* Titus i. 2. † Heb. vi. 17–20.

light gleams in the dark sky, and the angel of *Hope* drops in their ears healing words of comfort.

Here is another. An ark is tossed in a raging deluge. The heavens are black above. Neither sun nor stars appear. All around is a waste wilderness of waters. But, lo! by the window of the ark a weary bird is seen fluttering, and bearing in its mouth an olive branch of *Hope!*

Here, again, is a picture called "*The Father of the Faithful.*" Its subject is a solitary pilgrim, one of the world's gray patriarchs. He is treading along amid some wild pastoral hills, all ignorant of his destiny; but he has a staff in his hand—it is the staff of *Hope!*

Here is another. It is an Arabian Emir, once a Prince of the East, sitting amid ashes, the victim of a loathsome disease; and, worse than all, of Satanic power. But *Hope* tunes his lips to sing, "*I know that my Redeemer liveth.*"

Here is a vast exodus of six hundred thousand slaves from a land of bondage, separated by an inhospitable desert from the land of their fathers; but *Hope* silvers the edges of their pillar of cloud, and gleams by night in their pillar of fire.

Here is another picture, of exiled patriots seated by the waters of Babylon. They have hung their harps on the willows. They refuse to sing the Lord's song in that strange land. But HOPE is represented restoring the broken strings; and with their eyes suffused with tears, yet glistening with joyous visions, thus they pour out their plaintive prayer—"*Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south.*"*

Time would fail to traverse these halls and walls of ancient memory. HOPE, in every diversified form and attitude, is portrayed in the history of the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of prophets, the noble army of martyrs,—ay, sustaining too, in the midst of His sufferings and sorrows, the very bosom of the Son of God—for was it not *hope* ("the joy that was set before Him") that made Him "endure the cross, despising the shame?"†

And what *Hope* has proved in the history of the Church collectively, it is in the life of every individual believer. By nature he is a "prisoner," but "a prisoner of hope."‡ The gospel is a "gospel of hope." Its

* Psalm cxxvi. 4. † Heb. xii. 2. ‡ Zech. ix. 12.

message is called "*the good hope through grace.*"* The God of the gospel is called "*the God of Hope.*"† The "helmet of salvation" is the helmet of "*hope.*"‡ The "anchor of the soul" is the anchor of "*hope.*"§ The believer "*rejoices in hope,*"‖ and "*abounds in hope.*"¶ *Christ is in him* "*the hope of glory.*"** HOPE peoples to him the battlements of heaven with sainted ones in the spirit-land. He "sorrows not as others, who have no HOPE."†† When death comes, *Hope* smoothes his dying pillow, wipes the damps from his brow, and seals his eyes. "*Now, Lord, what wait I for? my* HOPE *is in Thee.*"‡‡ *Hope* stands with her torch over his grave, and in the prospect of the dust returning to its dust, he says, "*My flesh shall rest in hope.*"§§ *Hope* is one of three guardian graces that conduct him to the heavenly gate. Now abideth these three, "Faith, HOPE, and Love," and if it be added, "*the greatest of these is Love,*" it is because Hope and her companion finish their mission at the celestial portal! They proceed no farther, they go back to the world, to the

* 2 Thess. ii. 16. † Rom. xv. 13. ‡ 1 Thess. v. 8.
§ Heb. vi. 19. ‖ Rom. xii. 12. ¶ Rom. xv. 13.
** Col. i. 27. †† 1 Thess. iv. 13. ‡‡ Ps. xxxix. 7.
§§ Ps. xvi 9.

wrestlers in the earthly conflict. Faith returns to her drooping hearts, to undo heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free. *Hope* goes to her dungeon vaults, her beds of sickness, her chambers of bereavement and sorrow. To take Faith or Hope to heaven, would be to take the Physician to the sound man, or to offer crutches to the strong, or to help to light the meridian sun with a tiny candle; *Faith* is then changed to sight, and Hope to full fruition. LOVE alone holds on her infinite mission. *Faith* and *Hope* are her two soaring pinions. She drops them as she enters the gates of glory. The watcher puts out his beacon when the sun floods the ocean—the miner puts out his lamp when he ascends to the earth. *Hope's* taper light is unneeded in that world where "the sun shall no more go down, neither for brightness shall the moon withdraw itself, but where the Lord our God shall be an everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended."

VIII.

The Hill Mizar.

"All scenes alike engaging prove
To souls impress'd with sacred love!
Where'er they dwell, they dwell in Thee;
In heaven, in earth, or on the sea.

"To me remains nor place nor time;
My country is in every clime;
I can be calm and free from care
On any shore, since God is there.

"While place we seek, or place we shun,
The soul finds happiness in none;
But, with a God to guide our way,
'Tis equal joy to go or stay.

"Could I be cast where thou art not,
That were indeed a dreadful lot;
But regions none remote I call,
Secure of finding God in all."

—*Cowper.*

"It is profitable for Christians to be often calling to mind the dealings of God with their souls. It was Paul's accustomed manner, and that when tried for his life, even to open before his judges the manner of his conversion. He would think of that

day and that hour in the which he did first meet with grace, for he found it support unto him. There was nothing to David like Goliath's sword. The very sight and remembrance of that did preach forth God's deliverance to him. Oh, the remembrance of my great sins, of my great temptations, and of my great fears for perishing for ever. They bring afresh into my mind the remembrance of mercy and help—my great support from heaven, and the great grace that God extendeth to such a wretch as I."—*John Bunyan.*

"O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar."—*Verse* 6.

VIII.

THE HILL MIZAR.

In the preceding verse, we found the Psalmist chiding his soul for the unreasonableness of its depression—calling upon it to exercise hope and trust in God, under the assurance that he would "yet praise Him for the help of His countenance."

But "*what will ye see in the Shulamite?*" Another experience testifies afresh, "*As it were the company of two armies.*"* Hope has no sooner risen to the surface than despondency returns. The struggling believer threatens to sink. The wave is again beat back. His soul is again "cast down!" But one word—an old monosyllable of comfort—is borne on the refluent billow, "O my God!" This "strong swimmer in his agony" seizes hold of that never-failing support, the faithfulness of a covenant-keeping Jehovah. With this he breasts the opposing tide, and will assuredly at last reach the shore. The very tribulations that are casting him down,—

* Sol. Song vi. 13.

threatening to submerge him,—are only nerving his spirit for bolder feats; leading him to value more the everlasting arms that are lower and deeper than the darkest wave.

We have heard of a bell, set in a lighthouse, rung by the sweep of the winds and the dash of the billows. In the calm, stormless sea, it hung mute and motionless; but when the tempest was let loose and the ocean fretted, the benighted seaman was warned by its chimes; and beating hearts ashore, in the fisherman's lonely hut, listened to its ominous music. We read, in the previous verse, of the lighthouse of FAITH, built on the rock of HOPE. God has placed bells there. But it needs the storms of adversity to blow ere they are heard. In the calm of uninterrupted prosperity, they are silent and still. But the hurricane arises. The sea of life is swept with tempest, and, amid the thick darkness, they ring the peal of heavenly confidence, "MY GOD, MY GOD!"

My God! What a heritage of comfort do these words contain—in all time of our tribulation—in all time of our wealth—in the hour of death, and at the day of judgment! They describe the great Being who fills heaven with His glory, as the covenant portion

and heritage of believers. His attributes are embarked on their side; His holiness and righteousness, and justice and truth, are the immutable guarantees and guardians of their everlasting well-being. Hear His own gracious promise—"*I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God.*"* Moreover, He is the only possession which is theirs *absolutely.* All else they have, is in the shape of a loan, which they receive as stewards. Their time, their talents, their possessions, their friends, are only *leased* by them from the Great Proprietor of life and being. But they *can* say unreservedly, "*The Lord is my portion.*" "*God, even our* OWN *God, shall bless us.*" Ay, and we are told, "*God is not ashamed to be called* THEIR GOD."† "The *name* of the Lord" is thus "a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe."‡ That salvation purchased by Jesus,—the amazing method by which every attribute of the Divine nature has been mag-

* Zech. xiii. 9. † Heb. xi. 16. ‡ Prov. xviii. 10.

nified, and every requirement of the Divine law has been met,—is "for walls and bulwarks." The believer not only can lay hold on higher blessings—"the good hope through grace," "glory, honour, immortality, eternal life,"—but even with regard to the circumstantials of the present, the appointments and allotments in the house of his pilgrimage, he can feel that they are so regulated and overruled as best to promote his spiritual interests; and that "all things" (yes, "ALL things") are "working together for his good." Take then, desponding one! the opening words of David's lamentation. They quiet all apprehensions. This all-gracious Being who gave His own Son for thee, must have some wise reason in such discipline. Oh, confide all thy perplexities, and *this* perplexity, into His hands, saying, "*I am oppressed, undertake* THOU *for me!*" Who can forget that it was this same monosyllable of comfort that cheered a greater Sufferer at a more awful hour? The two most memorable spots in His midnight of agony,—Gethsemane and Calvary, the Garden and the Cross,—have this solitary gleam of sunshine breaking through the darkness, "O MY FATHER!" "MY GOD, MY GOD!"

Let us now proceed to the main feature in this verse. We have already noted how the exiled King had tried to reason his soul out of its depression by the exercise of HOPE—by looking beyond the shadows of the present to a brighter *future.* But the torch flickered and languished in his hand. He adopts a new expedient. Instead of looking to the *future,* he resolves to take a *retrospective* survey; he directs his eye to the *past.* As often at even-tide, when the lower valleys are in shadow, the mountain-tops are gilded with the radiance of the setting sun; so from the Valley of Humiliation, where he now was, he looks back on the lofty memorials of God's faithfulness. He "*lifts his eyes unto the* HILLS, *from whence cometh his help.*" "*O my God, I will remember* THEE!" "This is *my* infirmity," he seems to say, when he thinks of the weakness of his faith, and the fitfulness of his frames and feelings: "but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember *Thy* wonders of old."* With this key he proceeds again to open the door of HOPE. And as

* Psalm lxxvii. 10, 11.

he treads the valley of Achor, he "sings there as in the days of his youth." *

In connexion with this remembrance of his God, David alludes to some well-known places in his Kingdom—"*The land of Jordan, and the Hermonites, and the hill Mizar.*"

What means he by this reference? His language may admit of a twofold interpretation.

1. He may possibly refer to his present sojourn in the region beyond Jordan, with the Hermon range in sight; and which had this peculiarity, that it was beyond the old boundary-line of the Land of Promise, making him for the time, "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel."

We know from a passage in Joshua (chap. xxii.) how sacredly the division between the covenant people and the neighbouring tribes was preserved. The latter were denominated a "*possession unclean;*" the former, "*the land of the possession of the Lord, wherein the Lord's tabernacle is.*" How bitter must it have been to a patriotic heart like that of the Psalmist, thus to be cut off (even though for a brief season) from all participation in

* Hosea ii. 15.

national and sanctuary blessings,—to stand outside the land trodden by the footsteps of angels, consecrated by the ashes of patriarchs, and over which hovered the shadowing wings of Jehovah!

But he exults in the persuasion that Israel's God is not confined to lands or to sanctuaries. "*I will remember Thee,*" says the banished monarch. "Though wandering here beyond the region Thou hast blest with Thy favour, I will not cease still to call Thee and claim Thee as my God, and to recount all the manifold tokens of Thy mercy, even though it be from 'the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.' My foes may drive me from my home,—they may strip me of my regal glories,—they may make me the butt of scorn, the mark for their arrows;—but they cannot banish me from the better portion and heritage I have in Thy blessed self!"

If we should ever be in circumstances when, like David, we are denuded of the means of grace—shut out from the public ministrations of the sanctuary,—or, what is more common, placed in a disadvantageous position for spiritual advancement;—when our situation as regards the world, the family,

business, pursuits, companions, society, is such as to prove detrimental to the interests of our souls, —let us still "*remember God!*" Let the loss of means, and privileges, and opportunities, and congenial intercourse, draw us nearer the Source of all knowledge, and peace, and true joy. If the starlight be wanting, let us prize the sunlight more. If the streams fail, let us go direct to the fountain-head.

Yes, and God can make His people independent of all outward circumstances. In the court of an Ethiopian Queen there was a believing Treasurer. In the household of Nero there were illustrious saints. Down in the depths of the briny ocean, imprisoned in the strangest of tombs, a disobedient prophet "remembered God," and his prayer was heard. Joseph was torn away from the land of his birth, and the home where his piety had been nurtured, but in Egypt "*the Lord was with Joseph.*" "At my first answer," says the apostle of the Gentiles, "no *man* stood with me, but all *men* forsook me. . . . Notwithstanding, THE LORD stood by me, and strengthened me." Comforting thought! that the true Sanctuary, of which all earthly ones are

the shadowy type, is ever near: God Himself, the refuge and dwelling-place of His people to all generations, and who, wherever we are, can turn the place of forlorn exile — our "land of Jordan, the Hermonites, the hill Mizar"—into scenes bright with manifestations of His covenant love.

2. But the references to these several localities may admit of a different interpretation. David may be reverting to some memorable epochs in his past history — some green spots in the waste of memory, where he enjoyed peculiar tokens of God's grace and presence.

We spoke in last chapter of *Hope's* picture-gallery. *Memory* has one, stranger still — filled with landscapes of imperishable interest! Who has not such a gallery in his own soul? Let Memory withdraw her folding-doors—and what do we see? The old homes of cherished infancy may be the first to crowd the walls and arrest the eye;— scenes of life's bright morning, the sun tipping with his rising beam the dim mountain-heights of the future! In the foreground, there is the murmuring brook by which we wandered, and the

umbrageous tree under which we sat;—countenances glowing with smiles are haunting every walk and greeting us at every turn—the ringing laugh of childhood at some—venerable forms bending at others.

But more hallowed remembrances crowd the canvas. Ebenezers and Bethel-stones appear conspicuous in the distance—mute and silent memorials, amid the gray mists of the past, which read a lesson of encouragement and comfort in a desponding and sorrowful present.

David thus trod the corridors of memory. When the future was dark and lowering, he surveys picture by picture, scene by scene, along the chequered gallery of his eventful life! With Jordan at his feet, the Hermon range in the distance, and some *Mizar*—some "*little hill*" (as the word means)—rising conspicuous in view, he dwells on various signal instances of God's goodness and mercy in connexion with these localities—"I will remember Thee" (as it may be rendered) "*regarding the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.*"*

* "It is said by those who have visited those parts, that one

We know the other names to which he here adverts, but what is this "HILL MIZAR?" The answer can only be conjectural. It may be some small mountain eminence among the hills of Judah associated with the experiences of his earlier days. May not memory possibly have travelled back to the old home and valleys of Bethlehem, and lighted perchance on the green slope where the youthful champion measured his prowess with the lion and the bear. As the soldier reverts with lively interest to his first battle-field, so may not the young Shepherd-Hero have loved to dwell on this Mizar hill, where the God he served gave him the earnest of more momentous triumphs?

Or, to make one other surmise, may it more

remarkable effect produced is the changed aspect of the hills of Judah and Ephraim. Their monotonous character is lost; and the range, when seen as a whole, is in the highest degree diversified and impressive. And the wide openings in the western hills, as they ascend from the Jordan valley, give such extensive glimpses into the heart of the country, that not merely the general range, but particular localities can be discovered with ease. . . . From the castle of Rubad, north of the Jabbok, are distinctly visible Lebanon, the Sea of Galilee, Esdraelon in its full extent, Carmel, the Mediterranean, and the whole range of Judah and Ephraim. 'It is the finest view,' to use the words of another traveller, 'that I ever saw in any part of the world.'"—*Stanley's Sinai and Palestine*, p. 318.

likely refer to "*the little hill*" he most loved,—the home of his thoughts, the earthly centre of his affections, the glory of his kingdom, the joy of the whole earth—"*Mount Zion*, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King?"* We find Zion spoken of by him emphatically as "a *little hill.*" In one of the sublimest of all his Psalms, he represents the other loftier mountains of Palestine, —Bashan with its forests of oak, Carmel with its groves of terebinth, Lebanon with its cedar-clad summits,—as looking with envy at the tiny eminence amid the wilds of Judah which God had chosen as the place of His sanctuary: "*Why look ye with envy, ye high hills? this is the hill where God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever.*"† Is the hypothesis a forced or unlikely one, that, in this his season of sore depression and sorrow, he loved to linger on manifold experiences of God's faithfulness associated with *Zion*, — its tabernacle, its festivals, its joyous multitudes—his own palace, that crowned its rocky heights, where his harp was oft attuned and his psalms composed and sung, and in which midnight found him rising

* Psalm xlviii. 2. † Psalm lxviii. 16.

and giving "thanks to God because of His righteous judgments?" In the mind of the Sweet Singer of Israel, might not "glorious things" have been thought as well as "spoken of thee, O city of God?"

But, after all, we need not limit the interpretation to any special locality. The speaker's past history, from the hour when he was taken from the sheep-folds till now, was crowded with Mizars—hill-tops gleaming in the rays of morning. The valley of Elah, the wood of Ziph, the forest of Hareth, the streets of Ziklag,* the caves of Adullam and Engedi, —all would recall some special memorial of God's delivering hand. He resolves to take the goodness and mercy vouchsafed in the past, as pledges that He would still be faithful who had promised to "David His servant," "My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted."† "Thou who *hast* delivered my soul from death, wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"‡

The saints of God, in every age, have delighted to dwell on these memorable spots and experiences in

* 1 Sam. xxx. 6. † Psalm lxxxix. 24. ‡ Psalm lvi. 13.

their past pilgrimage. *Abraham* had *his* "hill Mizar" between Bethel and Hai. "*There,*" we read, "*he builded an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord.*" * On his return from Egypt he retraced his steps to the *same* locality. Why? Because it was doubly hallowed to him now, with these former experiences of God's presence and love. It is specially noted that "he went on his journeys from the south *even to Bethel,* unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; *unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first:* and THERE he called on the name of the Lord."†

Jacob's "Mizar" would doubtless be his ladder-steps at Bethel, where the fugitive wanderer was gladdened with a vision of angels, and the voice of a reconciled God. *Moses* would think of *his* "Mizar" either in connexion with the burning bush or the cleft of the rock, or the Mount of Prayer at Rephidim. *Isaiah's* "Mizar" would be the vision of the Seraphim, when his faithlessness was rebuked, and confidence in God restored. *Jeremiah* tells us specially of *his*—some memorable spot where he had

* Gen. xii. 8. † Gen. xiii 1–4.

a peculiar manifestation of God's presence and grace. "*The Lord hath appeared of* OLD *unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*" *

Or shall we look to the New Testament? The *Roman Centurion* would remember as his Mizar-height, the spot at Capernaum where mingled Omnipotence and Love uttered the healing word. The *Magdalene* would remember as hers, the Pharisee's banquet-hall, where she bathed the feet of her Lord with a flood of penitential tears. The *Maniac of Gadara* would recall as his, the heights around Tiberias, where the demon-throng were expelled, and where he sat calm and peaceful at the feet of the Great Restorer. The *Woman of Samaria* would remember as hers, the well of Sychar, where her Pilgrim Lord led her from the earthly to the eternal fountain. *Peter* would remember as his, the early morn, and the solitary figure on Gennesaret's shore. The *Sisters of Lazarus*, go where they might, would recall as their hallowed memorial-spot, the home and the graveyard of *Bethany*. *Paul of Tarsus* would ever remember as his, the burning

* Jer. xxxi. 3.

plain near Damascus, where a light, brighter than the mid-day sun, brought him helpless to the ground, and a voice of mingled severity and gentleness changed the persecutor into a believer—the lion into a lamb. *John,* the beloved disciple, as he trod the solitary isle of his banishment, or with the trembling footsteps of age lingered in his last home at Ephesus—John would recall as the most sacred and hallowed "*Mizar*" of all, the gentle bosom on which he leant at supper!

And who among us have not their "Mizars" still? It has often been said that, next to the Bible, there is no book so instructive as that volume which all God's people carry about with them—the volume of their own experience.

That is my earliest and fondest "Mizar," says one, the mother's knee where I first lisped my Saviour's name, and heard of His love. Mine, says another, is that never-to-be-forgotten sermon, when God's messenger reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come; when conviction was first flashed on my torpid mind, and peace brought to my troubled soul! Mine, is another's testimony, is that bed of sickness on which I awoke from the long life-

dream of indifference, and gave heed for the first time to the things which belong to my peace. Mine, says another, is that chamber—that closet of devotion—(alas! too long and guiltily neglected) hallowed and associated with a renewed consecration to God, and with manifold tokens of His grace and goodness. That hour of resisted temptation, says another, is the "Mizar" on whose summit my stone of gratitude is raised;—when I was trembling on the edge of some precipice, and God's hand interposed and plucked me as a brand from the burning. That awful bereavement is mine, says still another, which tore up my affections by the root, and led me to seek in God, the heritage and portion which no creature-blessing could bestow. It seemed at the time to bode nothing but anger, but I see it now the appointed herald of mercy sent to open up everlasting consolations. That solemn death-bed is mine, says another, when I saw for the first time the reality of gospel hope in the departing Christian, the sweet smile of a foretasted heaven playing upon the lips, as if the response to the angel-summons, "Come up hither!"

It is well for all of us, and especially in our seasons

of depression and sorrow, thus to retraverse life, and let our eyes fall on these Mizar-hills of God's faithfulness. In seasons of spiritual depression, when apt in our sinful despondency to distrust His mercy, and question our own personal interest in the covenant;—when tempted to say with Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this befallen us?"—how encouraging to look back, through the present lowering cloud, on former instances and memorials of Jehovah's favour, when we had the assured sense of His presence; and with an eye resting on these Mizar-hills on which He "appeared of old to us," disappointing our fears, and more than realising our fondest hopes,—to remember, for our comfort, that having "loved us at the beginning," He will love us "even to the end!" If we can rest on one indubitable token of His mercy in the past, let it be to us a Covenant-keepsake, a sweet and precious token and pledge, that, "though for a small moment He may have forsaken us," yet that "with great mercy He will gather us," and that "with everlasting kindness He will have mercy upon us."*

Why not thus seek, in the noblest sense of the

* Isa. liv. 8.

word, to rise above our trials, and perplexities, and sorrows, by taking the bright side of things. There are two windows in every soul. The one looks out on a dreary prospect,—lowering clouds, barren wilds, bleak, sullen hills, pathways overgrown with rank and noxious weeds. The other opens on what is bright and beauteous,—sunny slopes, verdant meadows, luscious flowers, the song of birds. Many there are who sit always at the former—gazing on the dark side of things, nursing their sorrows, brooding over their trials. They can see nothing but Sinai and Horeb—the trail of serpents and the lair of wild beasts. Others, with a truer gospel-spirit, love, with hopeful countenance, to watch the breaking of the sunbeam in the darkened sky. Like Paul, they seat themselves at the bright lattice, saying, "*Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, rejoice.*" Both look on identically the same landscape. But the one descry only dull heaths and moors draped in sombre hue. The others see these glorified with sunlight. The one gaze on nothing but inky skies and drenching torrents. The others behold the bow of heaven arching the sky, and the rain-drops glittering like jewels on leaf, and grass,

and flower. The one can descry only "Hill Difficulties" and "Doubting Castles." The others love to gaze on Hermons and Mizars, on "the Palace Beautiful,"—the land of Beulah;—and, bounding the prospect, the towers and streets of the Celestial City. They are ready to acknowledge that, however many may have been their tribulations, their mercies are greater and more manifold still;—that however many the shadowy valleys, the bright spots outnumber the dreary.

Are any who read these pages cast down by reason of trouble, and perplexity, and sorrow? Is God's hand lying heavily upon you—are you in darkness, and in the deeps? Seek to lift the eye of faith to *Him*. Seasons of trial must either bring us nearer *to* Him, or drive us further *from* Him. It is an old saying, "Affliction never leaves us as it finds us." It either leads us to "*remember* God," or to banish and *forget* Him. How many there are (and how sad is their case) who, when Providence seems to frown,—when their hearts are smitten like grass, their cherished hopes blighted, their gourds withered,—are led, in the bitterness of their spirits, to say, "My soul is cast down within me,

therefore, I will pine away in disconsolate sorrow. I will rush to ruin and despair. My lot is hard, my punishment is greater than I can bear;—all that made life happiness to me has perished;—THEREFORE, I will harden my heart. I do well to be angry, even unto death. Existence has no charm for me. I long to die—my only rest will be the quiet of the grave!"

Sorrowing one! be yours a nobler philosophy. Look back from these valleys of death and tribulation, to the gleaming summits of yonder distant *Mizar hills!* Mark, in the past, the tokens and memorials of unmistakeable covenant love. "Call to remembrance your song" in former nights. Wounded Hart! on the hills of Gilead, forget not thy former pastures. Go! stricken and smitten, with the tears in thine eyes, bathe thy panting sides in the cooling "water-brooks." When the disturbers of thy peace have gone, and when hushed again is thy forest home, return to "*the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense.*" Go, minstrel monarch of Judah, weeping exile! seat thyself on some rocky summit on these ridges of Hermon, and, surveying mountain height on

mountain height, in the land of covenant promise,—each associated with some hallowed memory,—take down thy harp, and sing one of thine own songs of Zion. "*Thou who hast shewed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth!*"*

* Psalm lxxi. 20.

IX.

The Climax.

"God of my life, to Thee I call,
Afflicted at Thy feet I fall,
When the great water-floods prevail,
Leave not my trembling heart to fail!"

"There is but a step from the third heavens to the thorn in the flesh."—*Winslow.*

"Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."—*Verses* 7, 8.

IX.

THE CLIMAX.

THE storm-struggle in the soul of the Psalmist is now at its height. In the previous verse, he had penetrated through the mists of unbelief that were surrounding him, and rested his eye on the Mizar hills of the Divine faithfulness in a brighter past. But the sunshine-glimpse was momentary. It has again passed away. His sky is anew darkened—rain-clouds sweep the horizon—"*Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts.*" Amid the environing floods he exclaims, "*All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me!*"

The figure is a bold and striking one. Some have thought it has reference to the sudden rush of water-torrents from the heights of Lebanon and Hermon;—that it was suggested by the roaring cataracts at his feet—Jordan with its swollen and winding rapids—the faithful picture of the deep-

worn channels in his own spirit—fretted and furrowed with the rush of overwhelming sorrow.

But the word rendered "*deep,*" is, in the original Hebrew, more applicable to the floods of the *ocean* than to the rapids of a river; and the image, in this sense, is bolder and more expressive still.* Billow calls on billow to sweep over the soul of the sufferer. They lift their crested heads, and with hoarse voice summon one another to the assault. "Let us be confederate!" say they. "Let us rouse the spirit of the storm! Let the windows of heaven be opened! Let the fountains of the great deep be broken up, that we may shake this man's confidence in his God, and plunder faith of her expected triumph! Ye angry tempests, driving sleet and battering hail! come and aid us. Ye forked lightnings, gleaming swords of the sky! leap from your cloudy scabbards. Old ocean! be stirred from your lowest depths. Let every wave be fretted to madness, that with one united effort we may effect his discomfiture and leave him a wreck on the waters!"

* From the uplands where he now was, in the recesses between the mountains of Gilead, David could catch here and there a glimpse of the "Great Sea."

They obey the summons. Already chafed and buffeted, they return with fresh violence to the shock. Affliction on affliction, temptation on temptation, roll on this lonely, surf-beaten cliff. Outward calamities—inward troubles; his subjects in revolt—his friends treacherous; his own son and favourite child heading the insurrection; he himself an exile, haunted with the thought of past sins that were now exacting terrible retribution;—and worse than all temporal calamities, the countenance of his God averted. Affliction seemed as if it could go no further—"ALL *thy waves and thy billows have gone over me!*"

We believe there are periods in the history of most of God's people corresponding to the awful experience recorded in this verse. Few there are who cannot point to some sad and memorable epochs alike in their natural and spiritual being, —some solemn and critical crisis-hours, in which they have been subjected to special and peculiar trials;—encompassed with the thunders and lightnings of Sinai—the trumpet sounding long and loud: —or, to revert to the simile of the Psalm, when the moorings of life have been torn away, and they have

been left to drift, on a starless, tempestuous ocean. Often, as with David, there may at such times be a combination of trials,—sickness—bereavement—loss of worldly substance—estrangement of friends—blighting of fair hopes. Then, following on these, and worse than all, hard thoughts of God. We see the wicked around prospering,—vice apparently pampered,—virtue apparently trodden under foot,—many passing through life without an ache or trial —their homes unrifled—their hearts unwounded—their every plan prospering—fortune smiling benignantly at every turn; while *we* seem to have been a target for the arrows of misfortune,—tempted with Jeremiah to say, "*I am* THE *man who have seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.*"* And doubting a God of *providence,* the next step is to doubt a God of *grace.* We begin to question our interest in the covenant,—to wonder whether, after all, our hopes of heaven have been a delusion and a lie. God's mercy we imagine to be "gone for ever." He seems as if He would be "favourable no more." There is no comfort in prayer—no brightness in the promises; the Bible is a sealed book;—the heavens

* Lam. iii. 1.

have become as brass and the earth as iron! Oh, so long as we had merely *external* trials, we could brave and buffet the surrounding floods. So long as we had the Divine smile, like the bow in the cloud, resting upon us, we could gaze in calmness on the blackest sky;—yea, rejoice in trial, as only unfolding to us more of the preciousness of the Saviour. But when we have the *cloud* without the *bow*,—when outer trials come to a soul in spiritual unrest and trouble,—when we harbour the suspicion that the only Being who *could* befriend in such an hour has Himself hidden His face,—when we have neither this world nor the next to comfort us—smitten hopes for time and despairing hopes for eternity!—this is the woe of woes—the "horror of great darkness"—"*deep calleth unto deep.*" We can say, with a more terrible emphasis far than the smitten patriarch, "*I* AM *bereaved!*"

The Psalmist had now reached this extremity. It is the turning point of his present experience. He has two alternatives before him:—either to suffer unbelief to triumph, to distrust God, abandon the conflict, and sink as lead in the surging waters; or to gather up once more his spiritual

resources, breast the waves, and manfully buffet the storm.

It is with him now, as with a sinking disciple in a future age :—when the storm is loudest and the midnight is darkest, the voice and footsteps of his God are heard on the waves: "*And about the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the sea.*" "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles!" *

And what is the first gleam of comfort which crests these topmost waves? It is *discerning the hand and appointment of God in all his afflictions!* He speaks of "*Thy* waves and *Thy* billows." These floods do not riot and revel at the bidding of chance. "*The Lord sitteth upon the water-floods.*" † While, in one sense, it aggravated his trials to think of them as Divine chastisements—the expressions of the Divine displeasure at sin—yet how unspeakable the consolation that every billow rolled at the summons of Omnipotence. "*The floods,*" he can say, "*have lifted up, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than*

* Psalm xxxiv. 6. † Psalm xxix. 10.

*the mighty waves of the sea."** *"O Lord our God, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them."* †

But he could go further than this. He could triumph in the assurance of God's returning favour; —that behind these troubled elements there was seated a Being of unchanging faithfulness and love. Already the lowering mist was beginning to clear off the mountains, and the eye of faith to descry sunny patches of golden light gleaming in the hollows. Soon he knew the whole landscape would be flooded with glory. The sailor does not discredit the existence of the beacon or lighthouse, or alter the direction of his vessel, because the fog prevents these being seen. Nay rather, he strains his eyes more keenly through the murky curtain, in hopes of hailing their guidance. When a cloud or clouds are passing over the sun's disc, and hiding it from view, the sunflower does not, on account of the momentary intervention, hang its head, or cease to turn in the direction of the great luminary. It keeps still gazing upwards with wistful eye, as if knowing that

* Psalm xciii. 3, 4. † Psalm lxxxix. 8, 9.

the clouds will soon roll past, and that it will ere long again be bathed in the grateful beams! So it was with David. He felt that the countenance of his God, though hidden, was not eclipsed. This pining flower on the mountains of Gilead does not droop in the anguish of unbelief, when "the Sun of his soul" is for the moment obscured. He knew that there would yet arise "light in the darkness." Amid the roll of the billows—the moaning of the blast—he listens to celestial music. Its key-note is "*the loving-kindness*" of his *God*. While the heavens are still black, and the tempest raging, he lifts the voice of faith above the war of the storm, and thus sings: —"*Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life!*"

"YET *the Lord!*" The believer, even in his deepest and darkest season of trouble, has always *this* alternative word—"YET *the Lord will!*" I am sunk in sore trial—"*Yet* the Lord" will be faithful to His promises! I have been bereaved of those near and dear to me—"*Yet* the Lord" will be to me a name better than that of son or daughter!

I have been laid for long years on this couch of suffering—"*Yet* the Lord" has converted this lonely sick-chamber into the vestibule of heaven. I have been tossed and harassed with countless spiritual temptations—"*Yet* the Lord" will not suffer these temptations to go further than I am able to bear. I am soon to walk through the dark valley—"*Yet*" will "I fear no evil, for *Thou* art with me!"

The Psalmist's assurance of deliverance was indeed the test of no meagre faith. We know well, how apt we are to be influenced and affected by present circumstances. When all is bright, and genial, and prosperous,—amid a happy home and kind friends,—in the midst of robust health and flourishing worldly schemes, the buoyant heart is full of elasticity. The joy *without*, imparts an *inner* sunshine. A man is happy and hopeful in spite of himself. But if all at once he is plunged into a vortex of trouble,—if clouds gather and thicken around,—the mind not only becomes the prey of its own trials, but it peoples the future with numberless imaginary evils, and its very remaining joys and blessings become tinged and sicklied over with the predominating sadness! It could as little

be expected, on natural principles, that the heart could in such circumstances be hopeful and rejoicing, as to expect that the outer landscape of nature would glow and sparkle with beauty, if the clouds of heaven obscured the great fountain of light.

But faith, strong in God's word, can triumph over natural obstacles. It did so in the case of this afflicted exile. He remembered how his God had vouchsafed past deliverances, even when he least expected them;—"*They looked unto* HIM *and were lightened*"* [literally, "their countenances were made bright."] He feels assured that the same loving-kindness will be "commanded" still. He sees God's covenant faithfulness resting calmly and beautifully, like the rainbow-tints in the spray of the cataract! "*Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*"†

This experience we have been considering is that of Christ's people only. But there is an experience

* Psalm xxxiv. 5. † Isaiah l. 10.

sadder still: that of those who are living "without God," and therefore "without hope;"—the billows heaving, and yet they knowing not of them;—"deep calling to deep," yet they ignorant alike of their guilt and danger! There is nothing more sad or touching in the midst of a storm,—when the vessel is reeling on the waves, and little expectation of safety is left,—than to see, amidst the settled gloom of despair, the little child playing on the deck, all unaware of what is impending;—or, at a time of heart-rending bereavement, when every face of the household is muffled in sadness and suffused with tears, to hear the joyous laugh and playful prattle of unconscious infancy. Ah! of how many is this the position with regard to eternity;—living heedless of their danger—the waves of destruction ready to close over them! Sadder far, surely, is *their* case, than all the troubles and trials of God's most afflicted people. *Their* waves and billows are crested with hope—"songs in the night" come floating along the darkened surges; but the future to the others has *no* ray of hope, *no* midnight star, *no* divine song! There is a time coming when, in a more awful sense, the

cry will be heard, "Deep calleth unto deep: all Thy waves and Thy billows have gone over me!" But there will be no after-strain—no joyous anthem of anticipated deliverance—"Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness!" In vain will the cry ascend, "My heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

But, blessed be God, that cry may ascend *now*—that Rock may be fled to as a shelter *now*. Sinner! these waves swept over the Rock of Ages, that they might not sweep over you! Sheltered in these crevices, you will be eternally safe. Not one blast of the storm, not one drop of the rain-shower of vengeance, can overtake you. When the billows of wrath—the deluge of fire—shall roll over this earth, safe in these everlasting clefts, you may utter the challenge, "*Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?*"

X.

Lessons.

"When darkness long has veil'd my mind,
And smiling day once more appears,
Then, my Redeemer, then I find,
The folly of my doubts and fears:
Straight I upbraid my wandering heart,
And blush that I should ever be
Thus prone to act so base a part,
Or harbour one hard thought of Thee!"

"Here deep calls to deep. Yet in the midst of those deeps faith is not drowned. You see it lifts its head above water."—*Bishop Hall.*

"We perceive the Psalmist full of perplexed thought, and that betwixt strong desires and griefs, and yet in the midst of them intermixing strains of hope with his sad complaints. . . . What is the whole thread of our life but a chequered twist, black and white, of delights and dangers interwoven? And the happiest passing of it is, constantly to enjoy and to observe the experiences of God's goodness, and to praise Him for them."—*Archbishop Leighton*, 1649.

"Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water-spouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."—*Verses* 7, 8.

X.

LESSONS.

In the previous chapter we spoke of the two verses which form the turning-point in the psalm,—the climax of the conflict therein so strikingly described between belief and unbelief. We referred to the boldness and expressiveness of the figure: the troubles of the believer, like the billows of the ocean calling on one another to unite their strength that they might effect his overthrow, but faith rising triumphant above them all. At times, when all human comfort gives way, God himself appears. "*The voice of the Lord is upon the waters.*" * *He* not only "commands His loving-kindness in the daytime," but "*in* THE NIGHT *His song is with us.*" Our heavenly Parent comes in earth's darkest, most tempestuous hours, sits by our side, sings His night-song—His own lullaby—"PEACE, BE STILL!" "*So giveth He His beloved sleep!*" † God's "songs"

* Psalm xxix. 3. † Psalm cxxvii. 2.

sound always sweetest "*by night*"—the deep, dark night of affliction. The nightingale's notes are nothing by day—they would be lost in the chorus of other birds; but when these have retired to their nests, she prolongs her tuneful descant, and serenades, with her warblings, the silent earth. The world can only give *its* song *by day.* It can speak only in the sunshine of prosperity. But "God our Maker giveth *songs in the night!*"* His promises, like the nightingale, sound most joyously, and, like the glow-worm, shine most brightly, in *the dark!*

Let us pause ere proceeding with the sequel of the Psalm, and ponder the great lesson to be derived from this experience of David.

It is, *to* TRUST GOD *in the darkest, gloomiest night of earthly trial!* To wait His own time, and to say when the billows are highest, "*Yet the Lord will*"——

This is one great end and design of trial, to exercise the grace of *patience.* There is nothing God loves better than *a waiting soul.* "*The Lord is good to them that wait for Him.*"† "*I waited*

* Job xxxv. 10. † Lam. iii. 45.

patiently," says David, in another Psalm, (or, as it is literally, "I waited, waited,") "*for the Lord,* and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry."* "*I know thy works,*" says Jesus, speaking of old, in the language of commendation, to His church at Ephesus: "*how thou hast* BORNE, *and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not* FAINTED."† How often has our way *appeared* to be hedged up with thorns,—as if there were no possibility of egress! In sailing among some of our own Highland lakes and inland seas, where the mountains, in a thousand fantastic forms, rise abrupt from the shore, we frequently seem to be land-locked, and able to get no farther. Yet the vessel pursues its serpentine course; and as we double the first jutting promontory, the lake again expands; the same waters appear beyond, gleaming like a mirror of molten gold. We find what we imagined to be an impassable barrier, is only a strait, opening into new combinations of mountain majesty and beauty. So is it in the Voyage of life. Often, in its fitful turnings and windings, do we seem to be arrested in our way;—"Hill Difficulties" rising

* Psalm xl. 1. † Rev. ii. 3.

before us, and appearing to impede our vessel's course;—but as faith steers onwards, impediments vanish, new vistas and experiences of loving-kindness open up. Where we expected to be stopped by walls of frowning rock and barren mountains, lo! limpid waves are seen laving the shore, and joyful cascades are heard singing their way to the silver strand!

And not only does God thus "command His loving-kindness" in disappointing our fears, but "in the night His song shall be with us." He will turn the very midnights of our sorrow into occasions of grateful praise! Yes! if not now, we shall come yet to see the "needs be" of every trial. We have only a partial view here of God's dealings—His half-completed, half-developed plan; but all will stand out in fair and graceful proportions in the great finished Temple of Eternity!

Go, in the reign of Israel's greatest King, to the heights of the forest of Lebanon. See that noble Cedar, the pride of its compeers, an old wrestler with the northern blasts of Palestine! Summer loves to smile upon it—night spangles its feathery foliage

with dew-drops—the birds nestle on its branches—the wild deer slumber under its shadow—the weary pilgrim, or wandering shepherd, repose under its curtaining boughs from the mid-day heat or from the furious storm; but all at once it is marked out to fall,—the old denizen of that primeval forest is doomed to succumb to the woodman's stroke! As we see the unsparing axe making its first gash on its gnarled trunk—then the noble limbs stripped of their branches—and at last the proud "Tree of God" coming with a crash to the ground; we exclaim against the wanton destruction—the demolition of this noblest of pillars in the temple of nature,—and we are tempted to cry with the prophet, as if inviting the sympathy of every lowlier stem—invoking inanimate things to resent the affront—"*Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen!*" But wait a little!—follow that gigantic trunk as the workmen of Hiram launch it down the mountain side,—thence conveyed in monster rafts along the blue waters of the Mediterranean,—and last of all, behold it set a glorious polished beam in the Temple of God;—and then, as you see its destination,—gazing down on the very Holy of Holies, set in the diadem of

the Great King;—say, can you grudge that the crown of Lebanon was despoiled, in order that this jewel might have so noble a setting? That cedar stood as a stately beam and pillar in *nature's* temple, but the glory of the latter house was greater than the glory of the former. How many of our souls are like these cedars of God! His axes of trial have stripped and bared them,—we see no reason for dealings so dark and mysterious; but He has a noble end and object in view—to set them as everlasting pillars and rafters in His heavenly temple, to make them "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of our God!"

Or take another illustration. Go to one of our graving-docks, where the weather-beaten vessel has been weeks or months in the carpenter's hands. Her started timbers are replaced, her shattered keel renewed, the temporary props and scaffoldings have been removed, and with her gay streamers afloat, and her crew on deck, she stands ready and equipped for sea. What is needed? Nothing but the opening of the sluices, to reunite her to her old watery element. She lies a helpless, decrepit thing, till these dock-gates be opened, and the buoyant waves rush

to clasp her anew in their embrace. It is done! But at first all is noise, and wrath, and tumult. These gurgling waters, discoloured with mud and sediment, convert the noble granite basin into an inky, turgid whirlpool. Ere long, however, the strife ceases; the great wooden wall raises itself like a child that has been awoke in its cradle by the voice of the storm — the waters gradually calm and subside; —higher and still higher is the vessel lifted, till, amid the cheers of the crew, she passes by the opened gates, and, with every sail spread to the breeze, is off to new voyages in her ocean-home.

Child of trial! "vessel of mercy!" your God sees meet at times to bring you into the graving-dock, that He may put His tools upon you, and refit and prepare you for the great voyage of immortality. When He opens the sluices of trial, you may see no mercy in His dealings. It may be "deep calling to deep"—the roar and heaving of antagonist waters; they may at first, too, stir up nothing but the dregs and sediment of sin,— expose the muddy pools, the deep corruptions of the heart. But be still! He will yet vindicate the rectitude and wisdom of His own procedure.

Ere long, these surging waves will settle peacefully around you, the shadows of heaven reflected in their glassy surface; and better still, strengthened and renovated by that season of trial, you will go forth from the Graver's hands more ready to brave the billows, grapple with the tempest, and reach at last the haven where you would be!

It is *hard discipline*—the undowny pillow, the trench-work and midnight vigils—which makes the better soldier. The type of strength in the kingdom of inanimate nature, is not the sickly plant of the hot-house, or the tree or bush choked in the dark jungle; but the pine rocked by Alpine or Norwegian tempests, or the oak mooring its roots in the rifted rock! David would neither have been the King or the Saint he was, but for the caves of Adullam and Engedi, the rocks of the wild goats, the forest exile of Hermon and Gilead. He had to thank *affliction* for his best spiritual graces. The redeemed in glory are ready to tell the same. "We would never have been here but for these storms of 'great tribulation.' But for the loss of that child —that worldly calamity—that protracted sickness—that cutting disappointment — that wound'ng of

my heart's affection—that annihilation of earthly pride and ambition—that 'deep calling to deep'—I would not now have been wearing this crown!" Trials have been well compared to the winds God employs to fill our sails and fetch us home to the harbour of everlasting peace!*

One word of caution ere we close this chapter. From all we have said—of "deeps" and "floods," storms and water-spouts, and midnight darkness—are any to leave these pages with the feeling that Religion is a gloomy, repulsive thing;—that the believer's life is one of darkness and despair;—that better far is the world's gaiety and folly—the merry laugh of its light-hearted votaries—than a life of sadness like this? Mistake us not! We repeat what we have already said. The experience we have been now considering is, in many respects, peculiar; one of those dark passages which stand alone in the diary of the spiritual life. *Religion gloomy!* Who says so? Shall we take St Paul as our oracle? What is his testimony? In all his

* See "Life Thoughts." The author has been more than once indebted, in this volume, to this suggestive little book.

letters he tries to crowd as much as he can into little space. In one of these, he has room for only two injunctions. But instead of giving two that are different, he prefers to repeat the *one*. It is the emphatic tautology, "*Rejoice in the Lord alway: and* AGAIN *I say,* REJOICE." * Or shall we seek a different tribunal? Go gather together all the philosophers of antiquity—Plato, Socrates, Aristotle. Bring together the wise men of Greece—the philosophers of Alexandria—the sages of Rome. Ask if their combined and collected wisdom ever solved the doubts of one awakened soul, as have done these leaves of this Holy Book? Which of them ever dried the tear of widowhood as these? Which of them ever smoothed the cheek of the fatherless as these? Which of them ever lighted the torch of hope and peace at the dying bed as these, and flashed upon the departing soul visions of unearthly joy? O Pagan darkness! where was *thy* song in the night? In the region and shadow of death, where did *thy* light arise?

But WE have a "more sure word of prophecy, to which we do well to take heed, as unto a light

* Phil. iv. 4.

shining in a dark place." The Christian is *the* man who alone can wear the sunny countenance. The peace of God, keeping the heart within, cannot fail to be mirrored in the look and life without! And if (as often is the case) he has his appointed seasons of trial—the sea of life swept with storms of great tribulation—it is with him as with yonder ocean. To the eye of the young voyager, gazing on its mountain billows, it would seem as if its lowest caverns were stirred, and the world were rocking to its foundations; while, after all, it is only a surface-heaving! There are deeps, unfathomed deeps, of calm rest and peace, down in that ocean's undisturbed recesses.

Believer in Jesus! with all thy trials, thou art a happy man. Go on thy way rejoicing. Tribulation may fret and ruffle the calm of thy outer life, but nothing can touch the deeps of thy nobler being. Troubles may rise, and "terrors may frown," and "days of darkness" may fall around thee, but "*Thou wilt keep him, O God,* IN PERFECT PEACE *whose mind is stayed on* THEE!"

XI.

Faith and Prayer.

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

"The soul of man serves the purpose, as it were, of a workshop to Satan, in which to forge a thousand methods of despair. And therefore it is not without reason that David, after a severe conflict with himself, has recourse to prayer, and calls upon God as the witness of his sorrow."—*Calvin on the Psalms.*

"I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?"—*Verses* 9, 10.

XI.

FAITH AND PRAYER.

TOUCHING was that scene which occurred three thousand years ago on the borders of Palestine: aged Naomi, in returning to the land of her own kindred from her sojourn in Moab, pausing to take a last farewell of her two loving daughters-in-law! One of these refuses to part from her. Strong may be the inducement to Ruth to return to the home of her childhood, and, above all, to the spot where hallowed dust reposes (the buried treasure of her young affections). But ties stronger than death link her soul to the one who had shared for ten years her joys and sorrows. With impassioned tears, she announces her determination! Her resolve may entail upon her manifold sacrifices. She may be going to an alien people—to a home of penury—to bleak and barren wilds, compared with her own fertile vales. But she is ready for any toil, any self-denial, if only permitted to retain

the companionship of that living, loving heart, which had been to her all that earthly tenderness could be.

Such, if we may compare an earthly with a heavenly affection, were the feelings of the banished King of Judah, at this time, towards his God. All the temptations that have been assailing him, have not repressed the ardour of his faith, or diminished the fervour of his love. Unbelief had done its best to sever the holy bond which linked him to his Heavenly Friend; but, like the tender-hearted Moabitess from whom he sprung, he will submit to any privation rather than be parted from Him whose favour is life. "Entreat me not to leave Thee," is the spirit at least of his fervid aspiration; "nor to return from following after Thee. Where Thou goest I will go, and where Thou dwellest I will dwell; and death itself shall not separate between Thee and me." As Peter, in a future age, rushed to the feet of that Saviour he had again and again wounded, so these many waters (the "deep calling to deep") cannot quench the Psalmist's love, nor many floods drown it. The voice of malignant taunt and scorn, "Where is now thy God?" might

have driven others to despair; but it only rouses him up, in the midnight of his struggle, to the exercise of new spiritual graces. "I shall not," he seems to say, "surrender my holy trust; I know the graciousness of the God with whom I have to deal. Nothing will tempt me to abandon my interest in the covenant. I shall take a new weapon from the Divine armoury; with it I shall seek to decide the conflict. No jibes of the scoffer, no rebellious son, no crafty Ahithophel, can rob me of the privilege of PRAYER." *"I will say unto God my Rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"*

It is, then, a combined exercise of *faith* and *prayer*, on the part of David, we are now called to consider. Out of weakness he is made strong, waxes valiant in fight, and turns to flight the armies of the aliens.

Let us advert to each in their order.

FAITH regards God here under a twofold aspect.

1. *It looks to Him as an* IMMUTABLE GOD.

Amid the fitfulness of his own feelings, this was the Psalmist's consolation—"*God my* ROCK!"

What a source of comfort is there here in the *immutability* of Jehovah. All else around us is unstable. External nature bears on every page of its volume the traces of mutation. Earth has the folds already on its vesture—the wrinkles of age on its brow. The ocean murmurs of change, as its billows chafe on altered landmarks. Human friendships and human associations are all fluctuating. So are our habits, and tastes, and employments. The old man, looking back from some hoary pinnacle on the past, almost questions his personal identity. And these emptied chairs!—these faces, once glowing at our firesides, now greeting our gaze only in mute and silent portraits on the wall! "Here we have no continuing city," is the oracle of all time.

"*But* THOU *art the same, and Thy years shall have no end.*"* "Heaven and earth may pass away," but there is no change, and *can* be none, in an all-perfect God! "The wheel turns round, but the axle is immutable." The clouds which obscure the sun do not descend from heaven—they are exhaled from earth. It is the soul's own

* Psalm cii. 27.

darkening vapours, generated by unbelief and sin, which at times taint and obscure the moral atmosphere. Behind every such murky haze He shines brightly as ever. "*Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?*"* "Young sailors," says Rutherford, "imagine the shore and land moving, while it is they themselves all the while. So we often think that God is changing, when the change is all with ourselves!"

2. *Faith regards this immutable God as a God in covenant.*

"My *Rock!*" Believer! you have the same immoveable ground of confidence! Look to YOUR God in Christ, who has made with you "*an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure!*" He, "*willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set*

† Isaiah x. 28.

before us." * The torch may flicker in your hand, the flame may be the sport of every passing gust of temptation and trial, but He who lighted it will not suffer it to be quenched. "*Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.*" † The Great Adversary may attempt to rob you of your peace, but that peace is imperishably secured. He must first destroy THE ROCK, before he can touch one trembling soul that has fled there for refuge! He must first uncrown Christ, before he can touch one jewel in the purchased diadems of His people! Your life is "hid with Christ in God;" because He lives, "ye shall live also!" God himself must become mutable, and cease *to be God,* ere your eternal safety can be imperilled or impaired. "If we perish," says Luther, "Christ perisheth with us."

Let us turn now to the Psalmist's PRAYER.

If *Faith* be called the eye, *Prayer* may be called the wings of the soul. No sooner does Faith descry God his "ROCK," than forthwith

* Heb. vi. 17, 18. † Luke xxii. 31.

Prayer spreads out her pinions for flight. In the close of the preceding verse, (when in the extremity of his agony,) David had announced his determination to betake himself to supplication—"*In the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.*" He follows up his resolution now with material for petition. He puts on record a solemn and beautiful liturgy—"*I will say unto God my Rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?*"

How wonderfully does God thus overrule His darkest dispensations for the exercise and discipline of His people's spiritual graces! In their overflowing prosperity they are apt to forget Him. He sends them afflictions. Trial elicits faith—faith drives to prayer—prayer obtains the spiritual blessing! It was the sense of want and wretchedness which drove the prodigal to cry, "Father, I have sinned!" It was the "buffeting" thorn which sent Paul thrice to his knees in the agony of supplication, and brought down on his soul a rich heritage

of spiritual blessing. It was these surging waves —the "deep calling to deep"—which elicited the cry from this sinking castaway, "*My heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the* ROCK *that is higher than I!*" "BEHOLD HE PRAYETH!" That announcement seems in a moment to turn the tide of battle, and change the storm into a calm. Well has a Christian poet written:—

> "Frail art thou, O man, as a bubble on the breaker;
> Weak, and govern'd by externals, like a poor bird
> caught in the storm:
> Yet thy momentary breath can still the raging waters;
> Thy hand can touch a lever that may move the world."

The struggle till now may have seemed doubtful; "*but they that* WAIT *upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.*"* It is said, the beautiful plumage of the Bird of Paradise not only impedes its flight when flying against the wind, but often in the ineffectual effort it is brought helpless and exhausted to the ground—its golden hues soiled and ruffled. When, however, a gentle breeze springs up, it spreads out its feathers in a fan-like shape,

* Isaiah xl. 31.

and is borne joyously along! So with the believer. When he is called to do battle with unbelief, the wings of faith are often soiled, and mutilated, and broken; he falls a helpless thing to the earth. But when God's own south wind blows, he spreads out his glorious plumage, and, rising on the pinions of prayer, is borne onwards and upwards to the region of heavenly peace and joy!

There are one or two characteristics in David's prayer worthy of note, with which we shall sum up this chapter.

1. Observe his INSTANT *resort to the "God of his life!"*

No sooner does the thought of prayer suggest itself, than he proceeds to the sacred exercise. Like the prodigal, not only does he say, "*I will arise and go,*" but the next record in his history is, "*And he arose, and came to his father.*"* Oh, how much spiritual benefit we miss by procrastination! The cloud of blessing floats over our heads, but we fail to stretch forth the electric rod of prayer to fetch it down! We determine on embarking, but, by guilty delay, we allow the vessel

* Luke xv. 20.

to weigh anchor, and we are left behind. Many an afflictive dispensation thus loses its sanctifying design. When the heart is crushed and broken, the heavenly voice sounds startling and solemn! What a season, if timeously improved, for enrichment at the mercy-seat! When "things present" are disenchanted of their spell,—when time is brought to hold its relative insignificance to eternity, what a season for the self-emptied one, to go to the all-fulness of Jesus, and receive from Him every needful supply! But, alas! we often know not "the day of our merciful visitation." The heart, when the hammer might be falling on it, and welding it to the Divine will, is too often suffered to cool. Solemn impressions are allowed to wear away,—the blessing is lost by guilty postponement. David might now have been so absorbed in his trials, as to have lost the opportunity of prayer. He might have invented some vain excuses for procrastination, and missed the blessing; just as the disciples, by their sluggish indifference and guilty slumber, drew down the thrice-repeated rebuke from injured Goodness, "*Could ye not watch with me one hour?*" But the golden moment is

not suffered by him thus to pass. No sooner does he get a glimpse of the path of prayer, than he proceeds to tread it. The very fact of the fire being so low, is the most powerful reason for stirring it. Her Lord being lost, is the strongest argument for the Spouse seeking Him without delay; —"*I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.*"*

2. Observe David's *importunity.* He waxes into a holy boldness. He seeks to know from "the God of his life" the reasons of this apparent desertion—"'*Why hast Thou forgotten me?*' I cannot see or understand, as Thy covenant servant, the reason of all this depression—why, with all those promises of Thine, these hands should be hanging down, and these knees be so feeble."

The mother does not cast off her sick or feeble child. Its very weakness and weariness is an additional argument for her care and love, and draws her heart closer than ever to the bed of the tiny sufferer! David knew well that God, who had ever dealt with him "as one whom his mother com-

* Sol. Song iii. 2.

forteth," would not (unless for some wise reason) leave him to despondency. Looking to this immutable Covenant-Jehovah, and lifting his voice high above the water-floods, he thus, in impassioned prayer, pleads "the causes of his soul:"—"*In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in Thy righteousness. Bow down Thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be Thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For Thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for Thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for Thou art my strength. Into Thine hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.*"*

3. The Psalmist *takes his* SPECIAL TROUBLE *to God, and makes it the subject of prayer.* He names in the Divine presence the cause of his deepest perplexity. "*As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me, while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?*"†

"Generalities," says a good man, "are the death of prayer." The loftiest privilege the believer can

* Psalm xxxi. 1–5. † Verse 10.

enjoy is the confidential unburdening of his wants into the ear of a *Father*. Just as a child can freely unbosom to a parent what he can do to no one else, so are we permitted to tell into the ear of our Father in heaven whatever may be the heart-sorrow with which a stranger (often a friend) dare not intermeddle. See the *speciality* in the Psalmist's confession of his sin. It is not the *general* acknowledgment of a sinner. It is rather a humbled penitent carrying *one* deep crimson-stain to the mercy-seat; bringing *it*, and *it alone*, as if for the moment he had to deal respecting *it* only with the great Heart-searcher. "My *sin* is ever before me." "I have done *this* evil in Thy sight." "Wash me from *mine iniquity*, and cleanse me from *my sin*." "I said, I will confess *my transgressions*, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of *my sin*." *

Let us not think that we can ever have comfort in merging individual sins in a *general* confession. This is the great and pre-eminent advantage of secret closet-prayer. Social prayer and public prayer are eminently means of securing the Divine blessing; but it is in the quiet of the chamber,

* Psalms li. and xxxii.

when no eye and ear are on us but that of "our Father that seeth in secret," that we can bring our secret burdens to His altar,—crucify our secret sins, acknowledge the peculiar sources of our weakness and temptation, and get special grace to help us in our times of need.

But we may here ask, Have we any assurance that the prayers of David, at this critical emergency, were indeed answered? Or, (as we are often tempted in seasons of guilty unbelief to argue regarding our prayers still,) did they ascend unheard and unresponded to?—did the cries of the supplicant die away in empty echoes amid these glens of Gilead? We have his own testimony, in a magnificent ode of his old age,* one of the last, and one of the noblest his lips ever sung, that Jehovah *had* heard him in the day of his trouble. It is a Psalm, as we are told in the title, written by him on his return to his capital, when victory had crowned his arms, and his kingdom was once more in peace. The aged Minstrel takes in it a retrospective survey of his eventful pilgrimage. Many a Mizar-hill in the long vista rises conspicuously into view. He climbs in

* Psalm xviii.

thought their steeps, and erects his Ebenezer! As his flight and sojourn beyond Jordan formed the latest occurrence in that chequered life, we may well believe that in uttering these inspired numbers, the remembrance of his memorable soul-struggle there must have been especially present to his mind. Let us listen to his own words: "*The sorrows of death compassed me, and* THE FLOODS OF UNGODLY MEN *made me afraid. . . . In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto* MY GOD: HE HEARD *my voice out of His temple, and* MY CRY CAME BEFORE HIM, EVEN INTO HIS EARS." In the sublimest poetical figures of all his Psalms, Jehovah is further represented in this hymn of thanksgiving as hastening with rapid flight, in august symbols of majesty, to the relief and succour of His servant—"bowing the heavens"—"the darkness under His feet"—"riding upon a cherub"—"flying upon the wings of the wind"—"sending out His arrows, and scattering His foes"—"shooting out lightnings"—and "discomfiting them." And with the writer's mind still resting on the same emblems which he uses in his Exile-Psalm,—the "deep calling to deep"—the "noise of the water-spouts"—the

"waves and billows,"—he interweaves other references and experiences with this unequivocal testimony to God his "*Rock*," as the HEARER OF PRAYER, —"*He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. Who is God save the Lord? or who is a* ROCK *save our God? The Lord liveth; and blessed be my* ROCK; *and let the God of my salvation be exalted!*" *

Reader! let me ask, in conclusion, do *you* know in your experience the combined triumphs of *faith and prayer*—these two heavenly spies that fetch back Eschol-clusters of blessing to the true Israel of God? Do you know what it is, in the hour of adversity, to repair to "the *Rock* of your strength?" Do you believe in His willingness to hear, and in His power to save? How sad the case of those who, in their seasons of trial, have no refuge to which they can betake themselves, but some fluctuating, perishing, earthly one;—who, when they lose the world, lose their all! The miser plundered of his gold, cleaving to the empty coffers;—the pleasure-hunter seeking to drain the empty chalice, or

* Psalm xviii. 16, 31, 46.

to extract honey out of the empty comb;—the bereaved grasping with broken hearts their withered gourd, and refusing to be comforted! The worldling is like the bird building its nest on the topmost bough of the tree. There it weaves its wicker dwelling, and feels as if nothing can invade its security and peace. By and by the woodman comes,—lays down his axe by the root. The chips fly off apace. The pine rocks and shivers; in a few moments it lies prone on the forest-sward. The tiny bird hovers over its dismantled home—the scene of desolation and havoc—and then goes screaming through the wood with the tale of her woes! The Christian, again, is like the sea-fowl, building its nest in the niches of the ocean cliff, which bids defiance at once to the axe and the hand of the plunderer. Far below, the waves are lifting their crested tops, and eddying pools are boiling in fury. The tempest may be sighing overhead, and the wild shriek of danger and death rising from some helpless bark that is borne like a weed on the maddened waters. But the spent spray can only touch these rocky heights,—no more; and the curlew, sitting with folded wings on her young, can

look calm and undismayed on the elemental war. "What is the best grounds of a philosopher's constancy," says Bishop Hall, "but as moving sands, in comparison of the Rock that we may build upon!"

Yes! build in the clefts of that immoveable Rock, and you are safe. Safe in Christ, you can contemplate undismayed all the tossings and heavings of life's fretful sea! So long as the Psalmist looked to God, he was all secure. When he looked to *himself*, he was all despondency. Peter, when his eye was on his Lord, walked boldly on the limpid waves of Gennesaret; when he diverted *it on himself*, and thought on the dangers around him, and the unstable element beneath him, "he began to sink!"

Believer! is your heart overwhelmed? Are you undergoing a similar experience with the Psalmist? Your friends (perhaps your nearest and best) misunderstanding your trial, unable to probe the severity of your wound, mocking your tears with unsympathising reflections and cruel jests—"a sword in your bones!" Turn your season of sorrow into a season of prayer. Look up to the God-man Mediator, the tender Kinsman within the veil! *He knoweth* your frame. When He sees your frail

bark struggling in the storm, and hears the cry of prayer rising from your lips, He will say, as He said of old, "I KNOW *their sorrows*, and I will go down to deliver them! O wounded Hart! panting after the water-brooks, I was once wounded for *thee*. O smitten soul! seamed and scarred with the lightning and tempest, see how I myself, the Rock of Ages, was smitten and afflicted!" Ay, and thou canst say, too, "*God* MY *Rock!*" Thou canst individually repose in that sheltering Refuge, as if it were intended for thee alone. The loving eye of that Saviour is upon thee, as if thou wert alone the object of His gaze,—as if no other struggling castaway breasted the billows but thyself!

Blessed security, who would not prize it! Blessed shelter, who would not repair to it! Oh that the Psalmist's creed and resolution might be ours —"*I will say of the Lord, He is* MY ROCK *and* MY *Fortress, and* MY *Deliverer.*"—"*O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the* ROCK OF OUR SALVATION!"

XII.

The Quiet Haven.

"Ah, if our souls but poise and swing,
Like the compass in its brazen ring,
Ever level and ever true,
To the toil and the task we have to do;
We shall sail securely, and safely reach
The heavenly Isle, on whose shining beach
The sights we love and the sounds we hear
Will be those of joy, and not of fear."

"David utters again strains of hope; not that faint and common hope of possibility or probability, that after stormy days it may be better with him, but a certain hope that shall never make ashamed; such a Hope as springs from Faith, yea, in effect, is one with it. . . . Faith rests upon the goodness and truth of Him that hath promised; and Hope, raising itself upon Faith so established, stands up, and looks out to the future accomplishment of the promise."—*Leighton.*

"In that day, the light shall not be clear nor dark: . . . but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light."—*Zech.* xiv. 6, 7.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."—*Verse* 11.

XII.

THE QUIET HAVEN.

We have now reached the close of this instructive Psalm—the last entry in the experience of the Royal Exile. Here is the grand summing up—"the conclusion of the whole matter." The curtain falls over the scene of conflict, leaving the believer triumphant. As he began with prayer, he now ends with praise; as he began with weeping, he now ends with rejoicing; as he began mourning over the loss of his God, he ends exulting in Him as "*the health of his countenance.*" We are reminded of the Great Apostle reaching, by successive steps in his high argument, new altitudes of faith and hope,—beginning with "*no condemnation,*" till he ends with "*no separation,*"—mounting with loftier sweep and bolder pinion, till far above the mists and clouds of the lower valley, he can utter the challenge, "*Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?*"*

Joyful is it when a protracted war, which has

* Romans viii.

been draining a nation's resources and rifling its homes, is drawing to a close,—when an army, amid hostile tribes, and the more fatal ravages of a hostile climate, has succeeded in trampling out the ashes of rebellion, and is returning triumphant from hard-contested fields of valour. Joyful is it when a noble vessel, that has for long been wrestling with the storm, enters at last the desired haven, —when the voyagers, who for hours of anxiety and terror have been hanging with bated breath between life and death, can now pass the gladdening watch-word from mouth to mouth—"Thank God, we are safe!" Joyful, too, when the tried believer, as described in this Psalm,—"*persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed,*"—has surmounted wave after wave, that has been threatening to sweep him from his footing on the Rock, and is made "more than conqueror through Him that loved him!" The wounded Hart we found in the opening verse bounding through the forest glades, hit by the archers, with glazed eye and panting sides, has now reached the coveted Water-brooks;—the fainting soul is now drinking at the great fountainhead of consolation and joy. We have elsewhere

an appropriate inspired comment on the whole Psalm, with its successive experiences: "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.*" *

This concluding verse is so far a repetition of the fifth; and yet, as we cursorily noted in the introductory chapter, there is an important difference between them, to which we may again for a moment advert. In the former, it is on the part of the speaker the language of faith in the midst of despondency, expressing assurance that something *will* be his, which he has not yet attained: "*Hope thou in God; for I shall* YET *praise Him for the help of His countenance.*" In the latter, he summons his soul to the exercise of the same hope and confidence; but he now can exult in the realised possession of God's favour and love—"WHO IS *the health of my countenance.*" Nay more, in the fifth verse he stops with the words, "*my countenance;*" but in the closing verse, he adds the expression of appropriating faith and triumphant assurance. It is the Key-stone of the arch. Two little words, which, like the ciphers following the unit, give an

* Psalm xxxiv. 19.

augmented value to all that goes before!—"My God!" The two last divine expedients to which he had resorted, (faith and prayer), have not been in vain. They have loaded the cloud of mercy, and it bursts upon the suppliant in a shower of blessing!

The 22d Psalm has been referred by commentators to this same period of exile among the mountains of Gilead. There is much to confirm this supposition in the general tone of the Psalm, as well as in its incidental references. There is the same deep, anguished depression of spirit,—words, indeed, denoting such an intensity of sorrow, that, though primarily applicable to David, we must look for their true exponent in the case of a Greater Sufferer. The challenge, "*Where is thy God?*" of the 42d, seems echoed back in the 22d by the mournful appeal, "*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*"

But in the latter, as in the former, (ere it closes,) light breaks through the thick darkness. By a similar exercise of faith and prayer, the Royal Mourner triumphs. "*Deliver my soul,*" says he, "*from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth.*" (Ver. 20,

21.) The prayer is heard while he is yet speaking! At this point of the Psalm, the language all at once passes from complaint into exultation—from prayer into praise; and the voice of victory rises higher and higher, till it reaches the close. God has taken off his sackcloth, and girded him with gladness. He already anticipates the happy time when again he shall be the leader of the festal throng on the heights of Zion. "*Thou hast heard me,*" is his opening burst of triumph, "*from the horns of the unicorns. I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee. My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear Him.*" *

Nay, further; what Psalm succeeds the 22d? Is it mere accidental arrangement which has given the beautiful 23d (the best known and loved of all David's Psalms) the immediate sequence? Is it a mere devout imagination which leads us to regard it (from the place it occupies in the Psalter) as the next his hand penned and his lips sung, after these plaintive elegies? This Song of the chosen flock

* Psalm xxii. 21, 22, 25.

is not, as many think, the Psalm of his boyhood, written in the days of his innocence, with his shepherd's crook and harp, in the Valleys of Bethlehem. The imagery of the Psalm *may* indeed have been taken from this sunny season of his youth. But, as it has been suggested,* the emblem may as likely have been borrowed from seeing a flock of sheep in these grassy regions reposing by "green pastures" and "still waters"—or, at other times, wending their way out of some "dark valley;"—one, perhaps a timid wanderer, clenched in the arms of the Shepherd, on his way with it back to the fold!

We have witnessed, after a day of gloomy fog and rain and thunder, the dense curtain that overhung the landscape rolling away. — The clouds break, gleaming vistas appear through their golden linings; and the rays of the long-imprisoned sun shine down upon ten thousand sparkling pearls on grass and flower. The choristers of wood and grove had till then been silent; but now are they seen brushing the rain-drops from the branches, and filling the air with their music, and all

* See these references to the 22d and 23d Psalms well stated in Blaikie's "David, King of Israel," pp. 322, 323.

nature is glad again. So it is with the Great Singer of Israel; so long as God's face is withdrawn, his wings are folded—his melody hushed—his harp unstrung. But when the thunder-cloud has passed,—when, as the clear shining after rain, the longed-for countenance again breaks forth,—when, in answer to those prayers that were mightier than the armies of Joab close by, his enemies are dispersed, and the way again open to a peaceful return to his capital,—may we not imagine the triumphant conqueror—strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might—making the Gilead valleys resound with the hymn of praise?—"*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters!*"* As he thought of all the trying discipline to which he had been subjected to test his faith, drive him to prayer, and lead him to thirst more ardently for "the living God," he could say in the retrospect, what he was unable to do at the time—"*He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*"† That path

* Psalm xxiii. 1, 2. † Psalm xxiii. 3.

was a rugged one—that trial a severe one—when he was found setting out barefoot, and dim with tears, across Mount Olivet, compelled to take refuge beyond Jordan amid the wilds of Bashan. But he acknowledges now that these were "*paths of righteousness.*" They were well and wisely ordered,—the hand of his God had appointed them. He can repeat with greater assurance his forbearing retort to the curses of Shimei—"LET HIM CURSE ON, FOR THE LORD HATH BIDDEN HIM." Moreover, all this wilderness-experience not only sustained him in the present—it nerved him for the future. God's renewed faithfulness in this trying hour was a pledge for all time to come. He had added another Mizar-hill to former memorials of the Divine goodness. With the prospect, at his advanced age, of the last and terminating trial of his pilgrimage, (the descent to the deepest and gloomiest ravine of all,) he could, with his eye on the guiding Shepherd, exclaim—"*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*"* Even tem-

* Psalm xxiii. 4.

poral mercies had been largely and bountifully supplied him in the place of his exile. The powerful chiefs of the Transjordanic tribes, as we previously observed,—"Shobi of Ammon, and Machir, and Barzillai of Manasseh,"—brought the rich produce of their fields and pastures for the supply of himself and his army. He could say—"*Thou hast prepared a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*" * And now, with the prospect before him of a joyful return to his throne, and the still more joyous prospect of being a worshipper in God's house on earth,—the type of the better Temple in the skies,—he can sing, as the closing strain of his exile—"*Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*" †

Reader! is this your experience? Is this the result of your temporal afflictions, the end of your spiritual conflicts,—to lead you to the same Shepherd of Israel, and to exult in Him as "the health of your countenance, and your God?" Elimelech, of old, was compelled by famine to leave Bethlehem,

* Psalm xxiii. 5. † Psalm xxiii. 6.

but his name signified, "*My God is King!*" When we are pressed with straits, and troubles, and perplexities, let *us* make that name our strong tower! "My God is King," is a glorious motto. Is it the heavings and convulsions of the world's nations—"kings of the earth setting themselves, and rulers taking counsel together," from motives of personal ambition, or political jealousy, or lust of conquest? Write upon all their schemes, Elimelech—"*My God is King!*" Is it the apparently mysterious discipline through which some may be passing—bereavements threatening your dwelling, or the hand of death already on your loved ones? Write on the darkened threshold, Elimelech—"*My God is King!*" Is it the prospect of your own death that is filling you with apprehension? Remember in whose hands, under whose sovereign control, that messenger is. Go to the vacant Sepulchre at Golgotha, and read that writing and superscription which the "Abolisher of death" has left for the comfort of all His people:—"*I have the keys of the grave and of death.*" Christian! even here, in these gloomy regions, "*thy God is King!*"

How blessed thus to be able, both in temporal

and spiritual things, to lie in the arms of His mercy, saying, "Undertake Thou for us!"—to feel that every thread in the web of life is woven by the Great Artificer,—that not one movement in these swiftly darting shuttles is chance; but all is by *His* direction, and all is to result in good! In having Himself as our portion, we are independent of every other;—we have the pledge of all other blessings. "Let the moveables go, the inheritance is ours!" Let the streams fail, we have the inexhaustible fountain! "Drop millions of gold," says good Bishop Hopkins, "boundless revenues, ample territories, crowns and sceptres, and a poor contemptible worm lays his *One God* against them all."* "*Our* all," says Lady Powerscourt, "is but two mites (soul and body). *His* all—Heaven, Earth, Eternity, Himself." We have said in a previous chapter that the loftiest archangel can tell of no mightier prerogative than looking up to the Great Being before whom he casts his crown, and saying, "My God!" WE can utter them in a

* "Were it not for this word of possession, the devil might say the Creed to as good purpose as we. He believes there is a God and Christ, but that which torments him is this—he can say "*my*" to never an article of faith."—*Sibbs.*

sense higher than he. He is OUR God *in Christ.* The words to us are written (which to the unredeemed angels they are not) in the blood of atonement! Imagine, for a moment, a conversation between a bright angel in heaven and a ransomed sinner from earth. The angel can point to a past eternity; he can tell of a glorious pedigree; he can point up to his Almighty Maker, and say, "He has been *my God* for ages and ages past. I have been kept, supported, gladdened by His amazing mercy, long before the birth of time or your world!" "True," we may imagine the redeemed and glorified sinner to reply,—"but I can tell of something more wondrous still. He is *my God in covenant!* Thou art His by *creation,* but I am His also by *adoption, filiation, sonship.* Though grace has kept thee through these countless ages, during which thou hast cast thy crown at His feet, what is the grace manifested to *thee,* in comparison with the grace manifested to *me!* Grace made thee holy, and kept thee holy; but grace found me on the brink of despair, plucked me as a brand from the burning, brought me from the depths of woe and degradation, to a throne and a

crown! *Thy* God hath loved thee. *My* God hath 'loved *me*' and GIVEN HIMSELF *for me!*"

And now we close our meditations on this beautiful and instructive Psalm:—a Psalm which, even since we have begun to write on it, we have seen clung to as a treasured solace in hours of sickness;—its sublime utterances soothing the departing soul, just as it was pluming its wings for flight to the spirit-world! Reader! in any future dark and troubled passages in your life, you may well with comfort turn to this *diary* of an old and tried saint, remembering that it records the experiences of "the man after God's own heart." Tracing *his* footsteps and tear-drops along "the sands of time," you shall cease to "think it strange concerning the fiery trials that may be trying you, as though some strange thing happened." You will find that "the same afflictions are accomplished in you," which have been "accomplished" in the case of God's most favoured servants in every age of the Church. Do not expect now the *un*clouded day. That is not for earth, but for heaven. God indeed, had He seen meet, might have ordained that your path-

way was to be without cloud or darkness, trial or tear;—no poisoned darts, no taunts, no contumely, no cross, no "deep calling to deep,"—nothing but calm seas unfretted by a ripple, sunny slopes and verdant valleys, and bright Mizar-hills of love and faithfulness! But to keep you humble,—to teach you your dependence on Himself,—to make your present existence a state of discipline and probation, He has ordered it otherwise. Your journey as travellers is through mist and cloud-land;—your voyage as seamen through alternate calm and storm.* And much of that discipline, too, is mysterious. You cannot discern its "why" and "wherefore." To employ a former symbol, you are now like the vessel building in the dock-yard. The unskilled and uninitiated can *hear* nothing but clanging hammers;—they can *see* nothing but unshapely timbers and glare of torches. It is a scene of din and noise, dust and confusion. But all will at last be acknowledged as needed portions in the

* "Sometimes I can rejoice in the Mount with my Redeemer. Sometimes I lie in the Valley, dead, barren, unprofitable. I am frequently wounded in the battle. Blessed be God that the Physician, the Castle, and the Fortress, are ever at hand."—*Bickersteth's Life.*

spiritual workmanship;—when the soul, released from its earthly fastenings, is launched on the summer seas of eternity—

"Give to the winds thy fears,
Hope and be undismay'd.
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears,
God shall lift up thy head:
Through waves, and clouds, and storms,
He gently clears the way;
Wait thou His time—so shall this night
Soon end in joyous day." *

Above all, let this Psalm teach you that your *spiritual* interests are in safe keeping. No wounded Hart seeking the water-brooks ever sought them in vain. When drooping, downcast, disconsolate yourself, remember "God is faithful." "He cannot deny Himself." "*He satisfieth the longing soul with goodness.*" None is "able to pluck you out of His hand." There may be fluctuations—ebbings and flowings—in the tides of the soul; but "*He that hath begun a good work in you, will carry it on until the day of the Lord Jesus.*" You may reach

* "David might have gone a thousand times to the tabernacle and never found a thousandth part of the blessing he found in this wilderness. It was in the absence of all that was dear to him as man, he found his special solace in God."—*Harington Evans.*

the heavenly fold with bleating cries,—with torn fleece and bleeding feet;—but you *will* reach it, if you have learned to sing, "*The Lord is my shepherd!*" You may reach the water-brooks with languid eye and panting sides;—but you *will* reach them, if you can truthfully say, "*My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God!*" You may begin your song in the minor-key, but if "My God" be its key-note, you will finish it with the angels and among ministering seraphim!

Go then, Christians! and, as you see what Faith, and Hope, and Prayer did for the Exile of Gilead, try what they can and *will* do for *you*. With all your varied trials, with all your manifold sorrowful experiences, who, after all (this Psalm seems to say) so favoured as *you?* Who possess your present exalted privileges?—who your elevating hopes?—the consciousness, even in your trials, that each billow is wafting you nearer the haven of eternal rest? "*These see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted*

because of trouble. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; SO HE BRINGETH THEM UNTO THEIR DESIRED HAVEN!"

"Soul, then know thy full salvation,
Rise o'er sin, and fear, and care,
Joy to find in every station
Something still to do or bear.
Think what Spirit dwells within thee,
Think what Father's smiles are thine,
Think that Jesus died to save thee—
Child of heaven! canst thou repine?

"Haste thee on from grace to glory—
Arm'd by FAITH and wing'd by PRAYER;
Heaven's eternal days before thee,
God's own hand shall guide thee there!
Soon shall close thy earthly mission,
Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days;
HOPE shall change to glad fruition,
FAITH to sight, and PRAYER to praise!"

THE END.

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